

Mental Health  
Commission of  
New South Wales

# Hope, strength and determination

Celebrating 50 years of women  
activists and reformers in mental  
health in NSW 1970–2020.



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## Acknowledgment of Country

The Mental Health Commission of NSW (the Commission) wishes to pay respect to the traditional owners and custodians on whose land we walk, work and live. We acknowledge and learn from the strengths of Aboriginal people, their culture and connection to country, land and waters across NSW. Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing underpins the strategies outlined in Living Well in Focus 2020–2024.

## Acknowledgment of lived experience

The voices of people with lived experience of a mental health issue and caring, families and kinship groups (lived experience) are at the heart of the Commission's work. The Commission acknowledges the expertise acquired through living with mental health issues and caring for people on their recovery journeys. We place lived experience at the heart of all we do, and value co-design and co-production.

**Edited by Rhonda Daniels**

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## Who we are

The Mental Health Commission of NSW is an independent statutory agency responsible for monitoring, reviewing and improving mental health and wellbeing for people in NSW.

The Commission works with government and the community to secure better mental health and wellbeing for everyone, and availability of appropriate supports in or close to home when people are unwell or at risk of becoming unwell.

In all its work, the Commission is guided by the voice of people with lived experience of mental health issues and caring, their families and kinship groups. The Commission promotes policies and practices that recognise the autonomy of people who experience mental health issues and support their recovery, emphasising their personal and social needs and preferences.

## Mental Health Commission of New South Wales

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# Minister's foreword



I am delighted to launch this book on women in mental health reform as part of the celebration of International Women's Day 2022.

The Mental Health Commission of NSW (the Commission) has produced this book to recognise and acknowledge some of the outstanding women who have initiated and led reform of mental health policy and services in NSW over the 50 years between 1970 and 2020.

Reform is about seeking to change or improve so that people can have better lives. It takes many forms and occurs at many different levels.

It requires visionaries, protagonists and implementers. The continuing search for improvement is a core function of the Mental Health Commission of NSW as defined in the Mental Health Commission of NSW Act 2012 No 13.

In this book, the Commission has focussed on women because their contribution to leadership and reform in the mental health sector has been under appreciated for far too long. Many of their achievements and initiatives have never been widely recognised, despite seventeen women being given Australian Honours, and five undertaking valuable Churchill Fellowships. There were and are extraordinary and tenacious women working across all the dimensions of the mental health sector and have wrought change, facilitated understanding, and improved communication and information sharing. They challenged the status quo, forged new ways to move policy and structural reform forward and

set up mechanisms to ensure the changes became embedded in best practice. They worked hard, often at great personal cost, to ensure that rights were recognised, the vulnerable were heard, and the workers were given development opportunities and adequately rewarded. Some women were bullied and harassed or indeed forced out of their positions by others whose positions, status or power were challenged by their integrity, values or logic. Many recovered from this treatment and fought on for reform, while others were permanently affected.

The featured women include consumers, public servants, clinicians, chief executives, volunteers, caring family members, academics and journalists. The women are passionate about improving the “system” and about making things better. They worked incredibly hard to achieve what they set out to do, and they succeeded. They are a diverse group.

All of them have initiated or made a significant contribution to initiatives which have changed the lives of people with a mental health issue and their families or carers. Others, such as Dame Marie Bashir and Professor Beverley Raphael influenced generations of psychiatrists in their visions for inclusive, respectful person-centred approaches.

The biographies show how reform has occurred both incrementally and dramatically over these 50 years. They also point us toward the future, with a newer generation rising and walking in the venerable footsteps of those who have led the way. They are the women who point the way for new leaders, reformers and activists, the work and passion driving us forward to enable our NSW communities to be “Living Well” into the future.

The selection of women is not exhaustive. The reader will immediately think of other outstanding women who should be recognised. It is an impossible task to know of and include every outstanding woman in the sector.

The book aims to raise awareness of the women who have been before us and to create a conversation. I hope it motivates other organisations and groups to look at who has contributed to their ethos and work and tell those stories to bring recognition to their own leaders, heroes and role models. And, of course, our focus on women is not in any sense to dismiss the contributions of many fine men.

We owe these women a debt of gratitude, and a celebration of their contributing lives.

I thank them for their incredible service.

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink that reads "B. Taylor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'l'.

**Bronnie Taylor MP**  
Minister for Mental Health  
Minister for Women

# Introduction

This book on women in mental health reform has been produced to recognise and honour the contributions of many women and to show through their brief biographies the ebb and flow of reform and change which has created the still fragile service system in NSW.

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To understand the political and social dynamics across these 50 years from 1970 to 2020, we have provided a timeline of change for each period. This is not a new approach, and we thank the writers of the Mental Health Coordinating Council book *Thirty Years Working for Mental Health* (2013), and the late Sasha Maller for his work on the history of PRA (Psychiatric Rehabilitation Australia) *PRA: The Story Celebrating 50 Years* (2005) for their use of this device and some of the information included.

The contributors were identified and invited through a process of consultation. The biographies are written in their own words or by a person close to them. Accordingly, they are all different in their emphasis and style. They are presented in chronological order in relation to the approximate point of their initial engagement in reform.

## A note on language

Language reflects changing attitudes. The Mental Health Commission of NSW (the Commission) values the lived experience of consumers and carers and relies on the contribution of lived experience to policy and service development.

The Commission prefers the term “mental health issue” to “mental illness” as people increasingly embrace their issues and work out how to develop hopes and dreams and have a contributing life. Increasingly diagnosis is seen as less relevant, and the focus is on what the person needs in the broadest sense to live a full and contributing life. The stigmatising language of previous times is shocking and may be distressing.

## Mental health in NSW: from colonial days to the 1970s

In 1976 the NSW Department of Health commissioned Dr Cyril Joseph Cummins, Director-General of Public Health in NSW between 1858 and 1975 to write a ‘History of Medical Administration in NSW 1788–1973’. The second edition published in 2003 is available on the NSW Health website. The Cummins report provides a context for reform from the 1970s onwards. This history is notably a history of colonial development.

NSW inherited the system of managing mental ill health, then described as lunacy, from England, with the gradual development of large institutions. Lunacy was not seen as a medical issue in NSW until the establishment of the first “asylum” in 1812.

Over the nineteenth century, medical involvement in asylums slowly grew, as did concern about the appalling

conditions of asylums and the inhumane treatment of the residents. A report by Dr Norton Manning, then Superintendent of Tarban Creek Asylum, later Gladesville Hospital, in 1868 for Premier Henry Parkes became the guiding framework for asylums and standards of care for the next century. In 1878 the first Lunacy Act was passed in NSW, formalising procedures of admission and discharge, and establishing the role of the Official Visitors. The end of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century saw some advances and setbacks for people with a mental health issue. Training for mental health nurses in the mental hospitals was improved.

Frequent complaints about overcrowding, treatment, accommodation and staff attitudes to patients led to a Royal Commission on Lunacy Law and Administration in 1923 and a Public Service Board of NSW Inquiry into Callan Park in 1948 with very little substantive change.

## First mental health act in NSW

In 1956, the Minister for Health appointed Professor William Trethowan to revise the Lunacy Act considering modern trends in psychiatry. This led to the first Mental Health Act in NSW, *the Mental Health Act 1958 No 45*. It removed much of the stigmatising language of the previous Acts, removed the Lunacy Act and the adversarial process of admission, and introduced the new role of welfare officers.

These changes stimulated significant recruitment of young psychiatrists in NSW. It was a time of massive social and political change in Australia and a new philosophy of mental health was gaining credibility. In 1960 there was another Royal Commission, this time into Callan Park following allegations of mistreatment.

In 1963 Dr Bill Barclay, a young and innovative psychiatrist, was appointed to a new role in NSW, Director of Psychiatric Services. He had a vision to build a statewide service, to progressively extend services into community settings by decentralising services from the large psychiatric hospitals to community facilities and general hospitals, to create training and employment opportunities for patients, to radically change psychiatric nursing training and to reduce the population of the mental hospitals by finding alternative accommodation.

Over the five-year period ending 1967 the resident population was reduced by approximately 20%, accompanied by a more than doubling in the admission rate. This increase could be interpreted as the system meeting increased demand from patients seeking early treatment, with consequent short stay and early return to social activity.

Sadly, many people were discharged into homelessness or inadequate accommodation in boarding houses or private hotels, most often with no support. There were some homelessness services, however mental health issues were not addressed.

The 1983 Report of the Inquiry into Health Services for the Psychiatrically Ill and Developmentally Disabled, (the Richmond Report), placed the issue of deinstitutionalisation back on the public agenda, and subsequently was blamed for a situation stemming from the 1960s. In 2014, David Richmond wrote about this in the context of the first “Living Well” Mental Health Strategy produced by the Mental Health Commission of NSW. “Contrary to the misconceptions of some, a significant exodus from institutional care through bed number reductions had already occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, well before the report, largely to meet budget pressure on the institutions. With some notable

exceptions, rarely had either money or services been channelled into community care to offset the impact on clients of these service reductions. Extra funding proposed by the report was, in part, designed to address this backlog” and “In retrospect, few other social issues over the last 30 years have generated as much controversy as the proposals contained in the report.” (Mental Health Commission of NSW website).

## Towards positive change

Positive change was starting to happen in the 1960s. In the psychiatric hospitals, departments of social work were being established, and efforts were being made to humanise treatments and support within the large hospitals thanks to many kind nurses and gradual inclusion of other professions. Private practice was growing in psychiatry and psychology, and community health services were being initiated.

Accounts of this early history of mental health make no mention of indigenous Australians, no recognition of an indigenous approach to social and emotional wellbeing or of the mental health impacts of multiple traumas, and almost no mention of women. Even in their important roles as nurses and matrons, women are largely invisible.

And so, we come to 1970, where our biographies begin. At the beginning of the 1970s, although mental health services were still mostly centralised in the large hospitals, hope was in the air!

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# Presenting the women

# 1970–1975

Margaret Lukes OAM  
Pamela (Pam) Rutledge AM  
Joy Moran

Realisation  
of the need  
for change  
and early  
steps

| 1970                                    | 1971                                                        | 1972                        | 1973                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 1974                                                                                                               | 1975                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Richmond Fellowship of NSW established. | First Australian Psychosocial Rehabilitation Workshop held. | Whitlam government elected. | <p>Sydney Opera House opened.</p> <p>NSW Health Commission formed.</p> <p>Community Health Program launched.</p> <p>Commonwealth Community Health Programs funded.</p> <p>Commonwealth funding for Community Mental Health initiatives introduced for the first time.</p> | <p><i>Handicapped Persons Assistance Act 1974.</i></p> <p>Royal Commission on Human Relationships begins work.</p> | <p>Whitlam government dismissed.</p> <p>Medibank, Australia's first universal health insurance program, introduced.</p> |



## Margaret Lukes OAM (1915–2011)

Social worker, passionate advocate for families and carers

Margaret was born in Sydney in 1915 to parents born in Scotland. She grew up in Mosman as an only child in a loving family environment.

Margaret would have described herself as a passionate advocate for good governance, meeting social needs and supporting the families of people living with mental illness. She was a social worker by profession, spending her early working life as a social worker in centres for unwed mothers in Britain and in Australia.

Margaret was a strong woman with a commitment to social justice and the value of good governance. She did not suffer fools gladly and when she took on a cause, she ran with it with gusto. When she started working in mental health, it was in the early days when there were few options available for consumers or carers and when stigma and discrimination was everywhere. Working in the early days as a social worker she listened to the real-life stories of people, and this motivated her to change things. One of her pet annoyances was ignorance and mental health misinformation so she set out to educate Australians about what was fact and what was fiction.

While working as a social worker at the Mental Health Association of NSW, Margaret listened to carers of people with mental health issues and felt they were taking on the

caring role with little community support. In 1975 she established a carers support group and a carers advisory committee. It was known as the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill (ARAFMI). The first support groups were made up of concerned relatives and friends who identified the need for a service that would specifically support carers of people with experience of mental illness. It was based on the principles of self-help and mutual support and aimed to build on the strengths of families and improve their quality of life by improving their capacity to cope and giving them hope. In 1985 she was honoured with a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for her contribution to mental health through support of families and carers.

ARAFMI expanded and, when Margaret retired, it was thriving in all states and territories of Australia. Margaret became the Patron of all the ARAFMI's and remained active in the work of the state and national associations.

In the late 1980s under Margaret's leadership, ARAFMI developed a high school education program on mental illness that later became an

independent program called Mental Illness Education Australia (MIEA). MIEA operated in most states of Australia and received an Australia Foundation Grant to fund national coordination of the program, bringing all states and territories working together. Margaret was President of MIEA (Australia). The strength of the program was that it had two key purposes: educating high school students about mental illness and using consumers and carers as trained presenters to break down stigma and demonstrate that anyone can experience a mental health problem. MIEA was one of the first school programs of this type. The MIEA program continues in some states today and was the forerunner of many other educational initiatives.

There were many things Margaret was proud of, but ARAFMI had a special place in her heart because, over the decades, she was able to see how the needs of carers were being recognised and better support provided. She was also able to see how giving voice to carers helped contribute to a consumer voice, particularly because she believed they had a shared vision.



## Pamela (Pam) Rutledge AM (1946)

Social worker,  
community mental  
health innovator  
and leader

Pam was born in Melbourne, but grew up in Sydney, having the idyllic childhood of beach and bush and a loving family although of very modest means.

Her parents and brother were staunch advocates for fairness and integrity and Pam absorbed this way of thinking from an early age. Career options were nursing, librarianship, or social work. Being both squeamish and short-sighted, social work was considered Pam's best option, and a Commonwealth Scholarship enabled Pam to go to university.

Pam thrived on the social values and strong and innovative teaching in the School of Social Work at the University of Sydney in the early 1960s, where group work, a family focus and community work were gaining strength.

Pam has been active in advocacy and reform across her life and extensive career in health, community services and mental health services. In her early career, Pam was an innovator, learning Italian to work at CO.AS.IT. (Centro Assistenza Italiano) and using community development approaches as well as one on one support. She was one of the first social workers to lead a community mental health team in NSW in 1972.

Her commitment and capacity led to her role as Executive Officer of the 1982 Inquiry into Health Services for the Psychiatrically Ill and Developmentally Disabled (the Richmond Inquiry), which was an early and significant contributor to the modernisation of services and the initial funding of community alternatives in NSW. Pam poured her heart and soul (and blood sweat and tears) into the inquiry and its report and found much of the subsequent criticism ill-founded and misplaced.

Pam then went on to lead reforms in other areas of NSW government, including the establishment of the public sector wide Senior Executive Service, the establishment of a national professional body for housing workers, and a range of initiatives in ageing and disability.

In 2009, Pam moved back to the mental health sector in the not for profit/community managed sector to become CEO of the (former) Richmond Fellowship of NSW. Here she was re-educated about lived experience by Valli Beattie, Janet Meagher AM and later by Fay Jackson.

She led the successful merger between the Richmond Fellowship NSW and PRA (Psychiatric Rehabilitation Australia) to create Flourish Australia in 2012, where she oversaw significant reforms including the exponential growth of the peer workforce and the innovative Resolve Program. In 2017 Pam was awarded The Mental Health Services (TheMHS) Award for an Exceptional Contribution to mental health.

Pam has continued her service and advocacy as a part-time member of the NSW Mental Health Review Tribunal since 2016 and as a part-time Deputy Commissioner of the Mental Health Commission of NSW since 2019. Pam was appointed to the board of Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) in 2018. Pam was honoured as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 2021 for significant service to people with a disability and other vulnerabilities. Pam is most proud of the opportunities she has had to work with and learn from people living with a mental health issue and social disadvantage to build a better world.

## Joy Moran

Social worker,  
deinstitutionalisation  
innovator

Joy (aka Joyce) was the senior social worker at Sydney's Gladesville Psychiatric Hospital. She was a highly respected professional and unstintingly passionate in promoting the welfare and best interests of patients at the hospital.

She was a caring and proficient leader to her team of social workers. Joy demonstrated her outstanding forward thinking in shaping the development of the closing down processes of the institutional mental hospitals, particularly Gladesville and Rozelle hospitals.

She led an innovative team to initiate the trialling of a deinstitutionalisation program, known internally as the "Domestic retraining unit" at Gladesville Hospital from the mid to late 1970s. It involved a select team of occupational therapists, mental health and community nurses, social workers and the hospital chaplain. The project aimed to prepare institutionalised patients to develop skills and competencies to cope with the world outside of the hospital environment. It supported the re-socialisation, re-skilling and re-training of targeted long-term patients. An important aspect of the process was to include hospital outreach supports to former patients after their discharge.

These were revolutionary ideas in that place and at that time. Despite some resistance from a proportion of institution staff, the project team persisted and the program succeeded. Former patients were placed in flats in the nearby suburbs and could access support through the hospital. The Gladesville Hospital Auxiliary, a non-government organisation, was formed by passionate staff members to support patients' rental contracts and bonds, and supply white goods and essentials for them as they left the institution.

When Joy retired in the early 1980s, it was said that she was one of the most inspired and highly respected mental health professionals that one could have hoped to meet during the 1970s in NSW.

She was a caring  
and proficient  
leader to her team  
of social workers.



# 1976–1980

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Beverley Raphael AM  
Janet Meagher AM CF  
Leanne Craze AM  
Wendy Weir PSM CF

Early days of  
activism and  
awareness  
of rights

| 1976                          | 1977                                                                                | 1978                                                                                      | 1979                                                  | 1980                                                            |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Creation of Rozelle Hospital. | Controversial final report of the Royal Commission on Human Relationships released. | NSW mental hospital statistics began to be incorporated into general hospital statistics. | Women awarded up to 12 months unpaid maternity leave. | Greater consumer participation in Non-Government Organisations. |



## Beverley Raphael AM (1934–2018)

**Leader, mentor, academic, psychiatrist, disaster management expert, prevention and promotion advocate**

Beverley, an inspirational and pioneering leader, changed many lives and career paths, and uniquely deepened and broadened the field of psychiatry.

Beverley was born and raised in Casino in northern NSW. Her extreme determination was a huge asset that served her well all her life. In the early 1950s she was one of very few women to enter medicine. Having become a psychiatrist, Beverley became an academic and conducted research and became Associate Professor at the University of Sydney in 1975.

At the University of Newcastle in 1978, Beverley was appointed Foundation Chair of Psychiatry — the first woman to become a full professor of psychiatry in Australia. She led academic departments of psychiatry in Newcastle, Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra; she was the Director of the Centre for Mental Health for the NSW Department of Health for a decade; she was president of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (1983–1985); she led the federal government's national program for promotion, prevention and early intervention in mental health and disaster management; and she was also dedicated to empathetic policy and treatment approaches in Indigenous mental health and HIV/AIDS.

Beverley had huge personal and professional challenges in her life, and these revealed the depth of her survival instinct and that she had enough “mongrel” to triumph in tight corners. In 1995 Beverley, together with Pat Swan, completed the report Ways Forward: National Consultancy Report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health. Subsequently, it was endorsed by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation at its national congress. This watershed report represented a national overview of the mental health needs and wellbeing issues of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It was a national policy and guiding principles and incorporated strategies and targets in outlining the “ways forward” to address the critical needs of this important and underserved group.

Beverley also contributed to prevention, women's mental health, child and adolescent mental health, and physical medicine and mental health. She tapped into a deeper level of the essence and the humanity of psychiatry, through grief, loss and dispossession, through trauma and suffering and the balancing power of hope. Beverley's mentorship added

to her own influence and changed the face of Australian mental health. She was a living example of just how inspirational an academic psychiatrist can be across so many domains of human endeavour and she inspired others to follow her path to aspire to the ideal. As a world leader in the fields of grief, loss, bereavement and trauma, she helped to ensure that psychiatry held its place as the integrator of the psychosocial with the biological, and thereby offered an antidote to the growing reductionism in mental health care.

Naturally, Beverley received many awards. In 1984 she was honoured as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for services to medicine particularly in the field of psychiatry. Many awards followed including the 2004 Lifetime Achievement Award of the International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies and the 2008 Medal of Honour from the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists.

Beverley held key leadership positions in state, national and international arenas. Beverley was a truly great Australian who made a unique and lasting contribution to the lives of countless people and to her field.



## Janet Meagher AM CF (1946)

**Pioneer activist, promoter of lived experience expertise**

Janet is acknowledged as an historically significant leader and an elder of the Australian mental health lived experience movement.

Having developed major mental health issues in 1969 and lived with schizophrenia since then, she has been an activist in mental health since 1979. For over four decades Janet's driving force for change has been directed primarily at governments, their laws and regulations, activities, programs, policies and procedures because she believes these must be informed and guided by those who are experts by experience. She is recognised across the disability and mental health sectors as an ethical leader with a passionate commitment to recognition of the human rights for people with disabilities and ensuring respectful influence by those who live with mental health issues in systems and services that impact their lives.

While she was a long-term patient in Sydney's Gladesville Psychiatric Hospital, Janet was appalled at the institutional processes that not only treated mental health issues but also caused trauma and allowed abuses to go unacknowledged and unreported. She says "all I ever wanted was to play a role in ensuring that the 'system' changed — to establish a system where no-one would ever be harmed when seeking or receiving care or treatment. I vowed that if I ever got out I would do

all in my power to understand how it functioned, and therefore determine what led it to fail so badly in matters of protection and violation of its duties to vulnerable patients."

Janet's history of institutionalisation led her to become an activist and advocate working for rights, equity, participation and respect for people living with mental health issues. She, together with others, founded several 'consumer' groups: Sh h h: Schizophrenia self help (1979–1982), NSW Consumer Advisory Group (1992–present) and Australian Mental Health Consumer Network (1996–2008). Janet was a founder member of the National Consumer Carer Forum (2002–2018) and amongst the founders of the National Register of Consumer and Carer Representatives. She is a patron of Sane Australia and Independent Community Living Association and a life member of Way Ahead and the World Federation for Mental Health.

Janet has held many influential appointments over the years, notably as a Commissioner, National Mental Health Commission (2012–2013) and member, National Disability Insurance Agency Independent Advisory Council (2013–2020). As the first Australian

consumer to gain a Churchill Fellowship in 1994, Janet investigated consumer empowerment and self-advocacy in the UK, US and Canada. Her report was published as a book, *Partnership or Pretence: A Handbook of Empowerment and Self-Advocacy* (1995, 2002). It was translated into Japanese and Spanish and was a game changer for people looking to become more active in their advocacy. In 2018, the book *Peer Work in Australia* included a focus piece co-authored by Janet titled "Scope, role and contribution of peer work".

She was honoured as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1996 for service as an advocate for people with mental illness and psychiatric disability. Other honours include the Humanitarian award of achievement and excellence for the advancement and improvement of mental health services 1992–1998 from the NSW Consumer Advisory Group, The Mental Health Services (TheMHS) Award for an Exceptional Contribution to mental health and the Australian Mental Health Prize in 2017. Janet suggests to newer generations of advocates that there's still plenty to do because there should be "nothing about us without us".



## Leanne Craze AM (1959)

**Mental health  
and social policy  
consultant**

Leanne was born in western Sydney, trained as a social worker and went on to obtain a PhD. She grew up with members of her family experiencing mental health issues during the era of the large old institutions.

As a young child this experience led to her committing herself to righting the wrongs she witnessed and to 'do her bit' to reduce stigma and discrimination. By 1979 she determined that she would set about to bring change and reform where she could.

In the 1980s, Leanne leapt into the review of Mental Health Magistrates inquiries in Sydney, and, as a result, she was able to contribute to the establishment of the Legal Aid Commission's Mental Health Advocacy Service and the introduction of legal representation for people involuntary admitted under the Mental Health Act. To round that decade off, she assisted the Victorian Parliament's Social Development Committee to conduct hearings, gather evidence, consider the research and to report on the Inquiry Concerning Mental Disturbance and Community Safety. In the early 1990s, she assisted the Australian Human Rights Commission to conduct its hearings and research processes for the Inquiry into the Human Rights of People with Mental Illness with Human Rights Commissioner Brian Burdekin.

After that momentous inquiry, Leanne co-authored the Model National Mental Health Laws and was able to contribute to both law and service reform for people with mental illness who were subject to indefinite detention in the criminal justice system.

In the late 1990s, she supported the development of mental health consumer organisations around Australia. She was honoured to be the first secretariat office for the Australian Mental Health Consumer Network (1996–2000). She has had over 30 years of experience providing consultancy services in a range of policy areas including mental health, housing, homelessness, disability and criminal justice, all through the lens of her social justice perspective.

Leanne is most proud of not having diverged from her original motivating force of advocating for the rightful place of the voice of people with lived experience of mental health issues in decision making and service delivery.

By 1979 she determined that she would set about to bring change and reform where she could.



## Wendy Weir PSM CF (1942–2014)

**Occupational  
therapist, innovator,  
pioneer, mentor**

Wendy was an occupational therapist and community mental health worker extraordinaire. She was a supervisor to generations of mental health occupational therapists and a wide range of allied health professionals.

She was an inspirational educator and trainer of mental health staff across NSW and Australia. She initiated communities of practice and ran forums for living skills centres and community residential staff.

Wendy made significant contributions to mental health services. She created mental health community rehabilitation centres and developed community based supported housing. She became the instigator of a national wave of living skills centres to support people who were being deinstitutionalised.

Wendy co-founded multiple family groups where the family 'role plays' interactions with the goal of preparing for behavioural disturbances. These groups were often extremely helpful for families learning to cope with mental health issues and were frequently hilarious though respectful and poignant.

In 1989 Wendy was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to visit model mental health services across the US and Canada, observing on her return that Australia's services are well-developed compared to some in other countries. As a Churchill Fellow, Wendy encouraged and helped to mentor and prepare others to gain fellowships.

From 1992 to 2000, Wendy coordinated and managed mental health services in northern Sydney. She developed a disability awareness package for the Premier's Department (1990), a statewide program for managing squalor, a consumer activity centre (Pitane, in partnership with Desley Casey) and supported the establishment of Northern Sydney Consumer Network and Northern Beaches Consumer Network. She encouraged strong consumer advocacy and was co-founder of SUNS (Service Users of the North Shore), the first formal Consumer and Family Advisory Committee to public mental health services management in NSW.

She was also a workforce strategist and responsible for the development of evidence-based team cultures and the enhancement of qualifications.

Wendy contributed to the development of many innovative policies including the National Mental Health Workforce Standards (2002). She was an ardent archivist and a published historian of mental health services in NSW, including a contribution to *Mental Health in Australia: Collaborative Community Practice* (3rd edition 2012).

In 1995, Wendy was honoured with the Public Service Medal. Wendy's commitment to the shared quest of reform in mental health services was paramount. She was generous in spirit, and was always giving of her time and energy, with staunch collegial loyalty and pastoral support for her co-workers, bringing good humour, huge generosity and a great sense of fun and celebration.

# 1981–1985

Joy Said AM  
Meg Smith OAM  
Jenny Coleman OAM  
Louise Rowland  
Julie Millard  
Anne Deveson AO

Beginning of  
community  
engagement  
and  
insistence  
on rights

| 1981                                                                                                                             | 1982                                                                                                                           | 1983                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 1984                                                                                                                          | 1985                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| UN declares International Year of Disabled Persons and ABS collects information on persons with a disability for the first time. | NSW Inquiry into Health Services for the Psychiatrically Ill and Developmentally Disabled (the Richmond Inquiry) is conducted. | <p>First death in Australia attributable to AIDS.</p> <p>Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC) established.</p> <p>The 'Report of the Inquiry into Health Services for the Psychiatrically Ill and Developmentally Disabled' (the Richmond Report) is released.</p> | <p><i>NSW Mental Health Amendment Act.</i></p> <p>100th anniversary of Callan Park Hospital.</p> <p>Medicare established.</p> | <p><i>Home and Community Care Act</i> passed (Federal Government).</p> <p>Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW established.</p> |



Joy  
Said AM  
(1941)

Advocate  
and activist

Joy grew up in western Sydney and at 15 worked in the Department of Housing with returned soldiers where she gained an awareness of mental health issues.

Her grandmother had taken people with mental ill health into her home, so Joy understood the naturalness and value of community living.

After a career in the courts where she witnessed inequality and injustice and later in the travel business, although with no mental health training, the board of Aftercare NSW (now Stride) saw Joy's potential both as a manager and as a passionate advocate for the rights of people with mental ill health. Joy joined Aftercare as CEO in 1981.

While Joy's achievements were many and significant over her nearly 30-year career in mental health, her strong and continued advocacy for the accommodation and holistic needs of mentally ill people was particularly significant. In 1982, following the International Year of Disabled Persons, a networking lunch was held with the few non-government organisations operating in the mental health space to share information on common difficulties. In 1983, the group agreed to an informal structure that became the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC) in 1986. Joy had a long and profound influence on MHCC and the development of the community managed mental health sector. She became the inaugural chair of the

MHCC board in 1988 and was either chair or a board member in at least ten of the years between 1988 and 2006.

Early in its time the MHCC ran a statewide phone telethon for consumers, where people with mental health issues could call in and talk about how they had been treated in mental health services, the lack of access to services and their feelings of overwhelming fear and discrimination. Joy reflected that "it was a kind of counselling, we just listened". This was the first real opportunity for people with mental illness in NSW to speak out and be heard. The response was overwhelming and highlighted the general lack of community resources. The information gathered through the telethon underpinned the first of many advocacy campaigns to government.

After the telethon Joy launched consumer forums at Aftercare to facilitate discussion of shared issues amongst consumers and provide training on key issues including housing, human rights, employment, medication and sexual relationships. She also introduced a public speaking course that enabled several consumers to give compelling evidence to the 1993 Burdekin Inquiry into the human rights of people with a mental illness.

In 1990 Joy was appointed to an Inter-Departmental Task Force of the NSW Departments of Health and Housing to increase co-operation by the departments when housing people with mental illness. This linkage was a forerunner of what was to become the successful Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) for people with mental illness. In 1992 Joy was honoured as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for service to people with a mental illness and people with an intellectual disability. Aftercare also received acknowledgement as the first organisation in NSW to comply with the Disability Services Act having moved services from hostel type accommodation with live in staff to individual housing with staff being located elsewhere.

Joy was one of the first in the mental health sector to ensure "nothing about us without us" was embedded in organisational operations. She refused to see people referred to as beds or numbers and insisted that they had a voice in decision making; she made space for the voice of consumers where previously they had been silenced.



Meg  
Smith OAM  
(1948)

Educator,  
consultant

Meg was born in Northampton England and migrated to Australia in 1958. She has spent much of her adult life as an academic and researcher.

She trained as a psychologist and obtained a PhD before working as an Associate Professor at Western Sydney University. Meg says “I became passionate about mental health advocacy after two hospitalisations for severe episodes of mental ill health. I was appalled at the lack of community mental health support, the lack of research into mental ill health and recovery strategies and the disempowerment of people with the lived experience of mental illness”.

Meg has been active in the reform of mental health services, advocacy and policy since the early 1980s, when she was initially diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Meg’s experience of mental illness led to her founding the Depression and Mood Disorders Association NSW in 1981 and she is still involved with its successor Bipolar Australia. She is the long-term president of the NSW Association for Mental Health (now known as Way Ahead). Meg was elected to their board in 1989 and is still contributing in this role. She has previously worked in women’s health as a community worker, has done much academic teaching in community welfare,

the community and its psychology, mental health studies, and counselling. Meg was the first councillor appointed to the Disability Council of NSW representing people living with mental health issues and was then appointed to the Disability Advisory Council of Australia.

Meg has served as a director of the Black Dog Institute and has been a part-time member of the NSW Guardianship Tribunal since 1990 and a part-time member of the NSW Mental Health Review Tribunal since 2003. She is currently an advisor to the Bipolar Hub at Western Sydney University and is a fellow of the Australian Psychological Society. She was honoured with a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in 1990 for service to community health.

Meg is most proud of “coming out about my lived experience of episodes of mental illness at a time when a diagnosis of mental illness often excluded employment as a professional psychologist”. Meg is also acknowledged as a leader who founded a unit of mental health studies in social welfare and social work courses at Western Sydney University.

“I became passionate about mental health advocacy after two hospitalisations for severe episodes of mental ill health.”



Jenny  
Coleman OAM  
Consumer organiser  
and advocate

Jenny, from Orange in regional NSW, has been the founder of local consumer organisations and supporter of lived experience involvement in policy and practice from the early 1990s.

Jenny has always wanted to use her experiences as a person living with persistent mental health issues for the betterment of others with mental health conditions. Jenny has been employed as a peer support worker by NSW Mid-Western Mental Health District since 1996. She was honoured with a Medal in the Order of Australia (OAM) in 2021 for her outstanding community and mental health work.

She co-founded the O'Brien Centre in Orange, a valued community resource for people living in the region. It is volunteer-run and has become a place where people with mental health issues can socialise and enjoy various activities including arts, music and games, and gardening.

Jenny began working in mental health after receiving her own diagnosis while raising young children on a farm: "I was diagnosed with bipolar in 1982 in the middle of a drought". She is a busy and enthusiastic activist, having been on the Orange Family Support Service committee, and was also a founding member of the Rotary Club of Orange "Daybreak". Jenny is a life member of Friends of Orange Botanic Gardens, a Yarn Market Molong committee member and has volunteered with Meals on Wheels for 12 years.

Jenny believes that much direct and indirect discrimination around mental health issues has reduced over the years, compared to when she was first diagnosed: "These days there are more facilities and supports once you know what's happening to you".

Jenny has always wanted to use her experiences as a person living with persistent mental health issues for the betterment of others with mental health conditions.



Louise  
Rowland  
(1952–2015)

Mental health  
consumer  
and human  
rights advocate

When Louise was first diagnosed with a mental illness, the impacts of prolonged abuse and traumas from her time in an overseas cult had taken their toll on her.

She was told that she should not expect to leave hospital as her psychological damage was so severe. Her mother, Maureen, successfully advocated for Louise to leave hospital. Throughout her life, Louise was encouraged by her mother to use her voice and tell her truth and make a difference.

Because of her experiences as a younger woman being involved in a cult, Louise was highly aware of and passionate about women's issues. Abuse in care situations and appropriate trauma-informed supports were issues that had not been spoken about in traditional mental health services. However, because of her courageous 'speaking out', they began to gain ground as significant issues that needed appropriate service responses. Louise was the first consumer representative to raise these matters in the public arena and became an enthusiastic consumer advocate, activist and voice for people impacted by mental health issues and trauma across Sydney, Newcastle and the Central Coast (circa 1985–2010). She advocated for schizophrenia awareness through the Schizophrenia Fellowship (now One Door) from 1985 to 1990.

Louise is remembered as a gently spoken powerful advocate who played a key role in the start up of the first mental health consumer-led drop in and information space for people impacted by mental health issues on the Central Coast (circa 1987). This initiative addressed the gap in trauma-informed supports for families impacted by mental health issues. It was a grassroots initiative supported by friends and family members of people living with mental health issues. It became the beginnings of the Central Coast branch of the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill (ARAFMI).

She was appointed to the NSW Consumer Advisory Group in the early 1990s. In her state-based advocacy she was an invaluable worker who worked with Janet Meagher AM in efforts to encourage and support disempowered consumers to speak up about their experiences of rights infringement and abuses in care. This was essential work to support witnesses to give evidence to the Human Rights Inquiry into Mental Illness by Australia's Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HEREOC) and spread awareness of the human rights of

people with mental health issues throughout the community.

In 1994 Louise was involved in Central Coast ARAFMI's Yakkalla pilot program, which expanded the organisation to Bateau Bay. Today Yakkalla continues as a peer-led, non-government organisation facilitating safe community spaces, social and recreation activities, and a student placement program in partnership with TAFE and universities. Louise was also a founding member of Oasis (1999), the first peer-led, social club for people impacted by mental health issues on the Central Coast at that time. As a member of Transitional Enterprises, Louise advocated and fundraised for housing and recreational activities for people impacted by mental health issues on the Central Coast. In the later years of her life she was a member of the NSW Mental Health Review Tribunal.

Louise was best described as a strong character, who was well-loved, kind and charismatic. The major role Louise played in consumer rights and consumer issues at the time cannot be overstated.



## Julie Millard (1956)

Advocate, consultant in mental health and credentialed mental health nurse

Julie says “I have always had an interest in social justice issues and mental health, working for equity and equality for everyone, and in volunteering to support groups and communities”.

These foundations have led to a career in nursing that started in the early 1980s, and in mental health promotion and prevention, education and training, advocacy and in support of consumer participation. Julie’s passion for inclusion and involvement has led to working with federal, state and local organisations to address the often unmet mental health needs of individuals, families and carers, employees, volunteers, specific population groups and communities.

Julie is an Official Visitor for the NSW Ministry of Health and supports the Western Sydney Recovery College through co-design and co-facilitation of workshops on mental health and wellbeing. Other opportunities seized include membership of community, primary health network and council committees and boards, always with a focus on mental health awareness and promotion. She advocates for human rights and equity through her

work as a board director and Regional Vice President Oceania for the World Federation for Mental Health. Julie has presented internationally on the impact of COVID-19, trauma and women’s issues. She is the co-chair of the Women’s Mental Health Section of the World Federation for Mental Health and chair of the women’s webinar working group. Julie has been an enthusiastic volunteer stage manager for MAD Pride since its inaugural event in 2003, and volunteered at numerous game events including the Invictus, Paralympic and Gay Games.

As a member of the volunteer group Women and Mental Health Inc. (WAMH) Julie was the treasurer and convenor of annual conferences and supported the development of the *Every Boundary Broken* report in 1997, which led to the development of guidelines for sexual safety in inpatient units for NSW Health. Work in the 1990s with

the Central Sydney Area Health Service’s Boarding House Team had a focus on the individual needs of people living in boarding houses (also known as licensed residential centres) across NSW, and the development of resources and services to meet those needs. Another area of achievement was the opportunity to establish the first community managed mental health non-government organisation services in five rural areas of NSW for the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) program.

Julie says “I have been privileged and honoured to have so many women mentors in my life and with my career — Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO, Janet Meagher AM, Elena Katrakis, Tony Ovadia and the late Leonie Manns and Allison Kokany to name but a few.”



Anne  
Deveson AO  
(1930–2016)  
Journalist, social  
commentator, mental  
health advocate

Anne was a highly acclaimed journalist, writer, broadcaster, filmmaker and social commentator. Born in Malaya, and spending her childhood between England and Australia, Anne's international career included working for the BBC in London and the ABC in Sydney.

Her many accomplishments included serving as the chair of the South Australian Film Corporation, executive director of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, and contributing to the Whitlam government's Royal Commission on Human Relationships (1974–1977), which paved the way for extensive social change and policy reform, including on women's rights.

An active lobbyist for the rights of women, children and people with disabilities Anne became a revered leader on mental health advocacy and reform in Australia. She was one of the founders of Sane Australia in 1986 and the Schizophrenia Fellowship in 1985. Her memoir *Tell Me I'm Here* (1991) detailed her son Jonathan's experience of living with schizophrenia and was later captured in the documentary "Spinning Out". The book won the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Non-Fiction Award in 1991. She was honoured as an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in 1993

for her work in community health and for increasing public awareness of schizophrenia and received the Centenary Medal in 2001.

The Anne Deveson Research Centre was established in her memory as an initiative of Sane Australia to promote the wellbeing of Australians affected by complex mental health issues. The centre undertakes practical research that drives policy change to produce better social outcomes. The centre prioritises research conducted in partnership with people who have lived experience of complex mental health issues and focuses on multidisciplinary research exploring the social impacts of these conditions and addressing stigma and discrimination.

Anne is widely remembered and respected for starting and improving public conversations about complex mental health issues, and for promoting understanding and empathy for people living with mental health issues and their loved ones.

... Anne became  
a revered leader  
on mental health  
advocacy and  
reform in Australia.

# 1986–1990

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Catherine Lourey  
Caroline Jones AO  
Yvonne Shipp CF  
Tony Ovadia  
Jenny Learmont AM  
Kath Thorburn  
Maree Teesson AC CF  
Catherine (Cathy) Conroy

Ramping up  
of activity

| 1986                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 1987                                          | 1988                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 1989                                     | 1990                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HEREOC) established.</p> <p>MHCC became incorporated.</p> <p><i>Disability Services Act</i> (Federal Government).</p> <p>Liberal Party MP Nick Greiner elected as Premier of NSW.</p> | <p>Disability Council of NSW established.</p> | <p>150th Anniversary of Gladesville Hospital.</p> <p>Australian Bicentenary.</p> <p>Barclay Report released by Ministerial Implementation Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disability.</p> | <p>Alzheimers Australia established.</p> | <p>Release of the 'Report of the Royal Commission into Mental Health Services' AKA The Chelmsford Report.</p> <p>NSW Mental Health Act.</p> |



**Catherine  
Lourey  
(1959)**

**Planner, system  
reformer, leader**

Raised in Sydney with extended family in the central west of NSW, Catherine grew up to value contributing to her community.

At university she studied planning, and later a research degree into housing outcomes for people with mental health issues under the ‘Richmond Program’, arising from the 1983 Richmond Report. Catherine traced the cycles in NSW of adverse reviews of the psychiatric system, followed by periods of mental health reform, and in turn, another review. As a planner this pattern resonated over her 30-year career — the fragility of system reform and the failure to secure the intended improvements for people with mental health issues to live their fullest lives.

It was in an early health planning role in the late 1980s that Catherine was tasked with the planning to redevelop a large psychiatric hospital. Through immersing herself in the practices, approaches and traditions of large-scale hospital psychiatry, she and her colleagues were able to realise new contemporary models of care and uncouple local services from the psychiatric hospital to bring services closer to where people lived. This was collaborative, challenging and complex work.

Catherine’s expertise is in taking a systems approach to change and reform and is passionate about how

to extend the opportunities for improved mental health and wellbeing outcomes across communities and the systems that are there to support them. For the next two decades she focussed on contributing to system change at the state and national levels.

From 2000 Catherine managed NSW Health’s mental health service and capital planning program. Collaborating across the Department and with the local health districts, and together with the collective expertise of clinicians, mental health services and design professionals, she reshaped the mental health capital investment program to embed state wide strategic service priorities, and embrace contemporary recovery-based design approaches.

Moving to the newly established National Mental Health Commission (NMHC) in 2012 Catherine contributed to mental health reform at the national level and a role which became a turning point in her career, in no small part due to her introduction to two inspiring female leaders with lived experience — Janet Meagher AM and Jackie Crowe. The *contributing life* paradigm at the NMHC — where people living with mental health issues have the opportunities to live

enriched and fulfilling lives of their choice — was foundational to her work and the Commission’s national reports. With Commissioners and colleagues, Catherine co-ordinated the development of three national reports to government over three years, fundamentally changing how advice was presented to government, and in turn informing the work of others, such as the Productivity Commission.

Catherine has continued to drive lived experience led reform at the Mental Health Commission of New South Wales (MHC NSW) first as Deputy Commissioner (appointed 2016) and then Commissioner (appointed 2017). Always passionate about keeping system wide reform accountable and on task, she advocates widely and has initiated three key projects in support of reform: a refreshed five-year NSW mental health and wellbeing strategy, indicators to track change in mental health outcomes for people and the system, and a public reporting cycle on reform progress. The work she most values is where collective effort with colleagues has bought about positive change and shifts across the system to enhance people’s experiences of services and opportunities for recovery.



## Caroline Jones AO (1938)

### Writer and broadcaster

Caroline Jones is one of Australia's most respected broadcasters and communicators, with over 50 years' experience as a film-radio-television writer, producer, director and journalist.

She was the first woman reporter on the ABC's flagship programs *This Day Tonight* (1968–1972) and *Four Corners* (1972–1981) while concurrently broadcasting on ABC Sydney morning radio.

Much of Caroline's public work has been dedicated to listening to her fellow Australians and drawing out their life stories. For 8 years (1987–1994), Caroline presented "The Search for Meaning" programs on ABC Radio National, in which hundreds of Australian men and women told the stories of their lives; and similarly, during her 20 years of presenting ABC TV's *Australian Story*, a pioneering series exploring the personal crises and triumphs of hundreds of Australians.

She says, "With the experience of mental illness in my own family, I hope that I have contributed to mental health through demonstrating the art of listening. As a shy child, I learned that I could be part of a conversation without talking, but by listening. Everyone likes a listener because they are few and far between".

"Anyone knows that to be listened to without judgment is a liberating experience — and a rare one. When someone listens to me with genuine interest, I am discovering more of who I am; I am being taken seriously, a crucial factor for my mental health: I am defining my sense of values; I may even disclose my hopes and dreams, and so enhance the possibility of their realisation."

"Listening may also bring a healing of loneliness for it makes possible a meaningful connection between people: a reassurance that we are not alone; opening the potential to share our lives with wonder, companionship, and courage; encouraging each other to live life to the full. Listening to each other is a prerequisite to doing this well."

Caroline has written widely on topics relating to ethics and spiritual and mental health. Her fifth book, *An Authentic Life: Finding Meaning and Spirituality in Everyday Life* (ABC Books, 1998), became a bestseller. In 1988 she was honoured as an Officer of the Order of Australia

(AO). In 1997 she was voted one of Australia's National Living Treasures. In 2013 she was awarded a Walkley Award for her outstanding contribution to journalism and that same year she was appointed national patron of Women in Media, a mentoring and networking program.

When she retired from the ABC in 2016, the ABC News Division created The Caroline Jones Indigenous Scholarship. Caroline is also a sponsor of Tertiary Indigenous Scholarships awarded by Mary Mackillop Today.

Caroline says she would be proud to have as her epitaph "She was a good listener" ... even if they had to add in brackets ("most of the time").

## Yvonne Shipp CF (1942–2006)

### Carer/Family advocate

Yvonne had a close family member who experienced mental distress and consequently had her children removed from her care.

Yvonne regarded this as grossly unfair and punitive as the mother needed kindness, support and care, not enforced loss and rejection. This became Yvonne's stimulus to become a family advocate. She started at Charmian Clift Cottages as the Director around 1988. This service was NSW's first mother and child mental health service, based in Blacktown in western Sydney.

Prior to that role, Yvonne had worked with disadvantaged families since 1977. She participated as a member of the Women and Mental Health Group (1995–2000), which led three annual conferences attended by consumers, service providers and others. These experiences reinforced Yvonne's beliefs that many women living with mental health issues did not have the comprehensive services essential to their recovery.

Yvonne received a Churchill Fellowship in 1996 to study services and treatment options for mothers affected by a mental health disorder with dependent children in Great Britain, the US and Canada. In her

Churchill Fellowship report Yvonne noted that Charmian Clift Cottages was cited as a model in the Burdekin Report of 1993 (Inquiry into Human Rights of People with a Mental Illness) but remained one of the few residential services accepting women and their children for many years. Yvonne's report made recommendations, but it is unclear how much they influenced the continuing delivery of those services she had advocated so strongly for. Charmian Clift Cottages received an inaugural national The Mental Health Services (TheMHS) Achievement Award in 1992, winning the silver award in the NGO and Advocacy Services category. This service has continued and thrived. In 2008 it was re-auspiced by the then Richmond Fellowship of NSW, now Flourish Australia.

Yvonne's subsequent activism saw her become chair of the NSW Consumer Advisory Group and, a short time later, the NSW representative on the National Consumer Advisory Group. She was a board member of the Mental Health Coordinating Council (1990–1997) and the chair from 1993 to 1995.

Yvonne's energies moved on to supporting and strengthening consumer and carer advocacy movements and organisations. In August 1996, consumers and other supporters came together (under the auspice of the NSW Consumer Advisory Group, the precursor to today's BEING) in a one-day forum that produced a blueprint for consumer and carer participation. The booklet, *From Consumer to Citizen* (1997), compiled by Yvonne with guidance from Janet Meagher AM and Leonie Manns, was a watershed document in development of the lived experience voice in NSW.

Later Yvonne was one of the many advocates involved in development of *The Kit: A Guide to the Advocacy We Choose to Do* (Spice Consulting, Sydney, 1998). This was a National Mental Health Strategy community development project in which Janet Meagher AM and Meg Smith OAM were also contributors and advisors. Yvonne's energies supported and strengthened consumer and carer advocacy movements and organisations.



**Tony  
Ovadia  
(1945)  
Psychologist,  
advocate**

Fortunee (Tony) is a retired clinical psychologist and consultant with a long association with Ethnic Community Services Cooperative and multicultural services.

She was an advocate for interpreters and cross-cultural services prior to that. Tony participated in developing the first NSW Health policy on multicultural and ethnic community matters. She has worked in health, disability, housing and community services as a clinician, policy officer and manager as well as working in services for indigenous people. She has made a dedicated commitment to work on boards, complaint bodies and tribunals including the NSW Mental Health Review Tribunal. Another dimension to her work is illustrated by her commitment to disability.

Tony has been a strong advocate for people living with a disability and was appointed chair of the Disability Council of NSW in 1992. Tony was a member of Women and Mental Health Inc., managed the Central Sydney Area Health Service Boarding

House Team, and was instrumental in the development of the framework for managing the quality of health services in NSW in 1998. In her early career she identified housing as a major issue for people with mental health issues and had a major interest in supported accommodation. Another significant contribution, together with Louise Webb, was a major consultancy investigating domestic violence in the non-English speaking communities of Australia.

Tony reports being greatly influenced by Bruce Leabeater, Principal Psychologist in NSW, and Dr Lindsay Madew, a psychiatrist who was one of the founders of the Richmond Fellowship of NSW.

**Tony has been a strong advocate for people living with a disability ...**



## Jenny Learmont AM (1937)

**Carer, innovator,  
advocate**

Jenny grew up in Lawson in NSW, and in her early life was influenced by her father, the local doctor. Jenny's early working life was in the NSW Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service in Sydney.

Jenny has been a carer for 40 years of a son who developed obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) at the age of 13, and in his early twenties developed borderline personality disorder and bipolar disorder. To relieve his distressing and debilitating symptoms, he resorted to drug and alcohol misuse.

For many years, Jenny had no supports for herself as a carer. In 1990, she established the Anxiety Disorders Alliance (ADA), a standing committee made up of volunteers of the NSW Mental Health Association (MHA). She remained chair of ADA until 2006 during which time ADA started support groups for those with OCD and other anxiety disorders and for their carers and friends. During the 1990s and early 2000s, ADA organised several national conferences on anxiety disorders, and in 2000 created Small Steps, an education program for primary school teachers and parents. ADA significantly contributed to community understanding of, and to breaking down discrimination relating

to, anxiety disorders. In 2006, Jenny expanded ADA to create the Anxiety Disorders Association NSW Inc. (ADAN) to progress the work of community education around anxiety disorders and was president from 2006 to 2015. In 2012, she was elected a member of the board of the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill (ARAFMI), now called Mental Health Carers NSW, and since 2019 has been the organisation's president.

In 2005, Jenny was a founding member and then chair of the NSW Consumers Advisory Committee, now known as BEING. Jenny is a member of the advisory committee for the Centre for Emotional Health at Macquarie University and is on the General Peak Advisory Committee of Mental Health Carers NSW and its Alcohol and Drug Peak Advisory Committee. She is a member of the Private Mental Health Consumer Network (now known as Lived Experience Australia) and the Anxiety Disorders Reference Committee, NSW.

For many years Jenny led a research team into long-term non-progression of HIV in a cohort of blood transfusion recipients at the NSW Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service. Jenny is now an Honorary Associate of the Centre for Virus Research at the Westmead Millennium Institute.

In 1996 Jenny was honoured as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) and admitted to the degree of Doctor of Medicine Honoris Causa at the University of NSW for eminent service to the community. She is a member of the NSW Mental Health Review Tribunal.

Jenny is most proud of her work in giving a voice and support to carers and to those with a mental illness, especially of her role in creating the educational program Small Steps and in furthering support groups for consumers and carers of anxiety disorders. There are now over 30 groups throughout NSW.



**Kath  
Thorburn  
(1969)  
Facilitator  
and educator**

## Kath's childhood experiences, tied to those of her family, caused her to question approaches to mental distress and extreme states from an early age.

Some of her most formative experiences were directly related to the way her mother was treated by services, the community, friends and family (both the positive and negative) and also witnessing her mother's responses to these (with determination and, at times, devastation). "I remember spending many hours explaining mum's diagnosis to family members, hoping this would lead to better understanding and better support. (It didn't.) I tried to encourage them to talk with her about it. When my much-loved grandmother visited, she would whisper to me 'how's your mother?' and I would reply 'why don't you ask her?'" It is probably no surprise that Kath gravitated towards mental health work, particularly education and advocacy.

Kath commenced work in community mental health services in the 1990s. Early on she had a role that was a direct response to the systemic abuses and discrimination exposed by the 1993 Burdekin Report, a national inquiry into the human rights of people whose experiences are labelled mental illness. As Community

Liaison Officer in the then Eastern Sydney Area Health Service (now South Eastern Sydney Local Health District) Kath spent half her time in education and advocacy, and the other half working on a mobile community treatment team. During these years she met Sandy Watson, with whom she developed a close collaboration and enduring friendship. They reconnected at the NSW Institute of Psychiatry, developing and facilitating workshops and courses with and for people with lived experience, and mental health and community support workers. It was there that new courses were developed. These courses were based on lived experience knowledge and promoted recovery-oriented and peer-driven approaches. Those courses were co-facilitated with other educators, advocates and activists for almost 10 years.

In 2011 Kath and Sandy, along with Michelle Everett, co-founded the business inside out & associates australia. They wanted to create spaces for critical conversations about extreme states and mental distress, promoting lived expertise and consumer-led responses to these.

Over the years they have facilitated awareness raising, educational and social action events, conferences, workshops and courses for a range of people committed to better approaches to mental distress experiences. They have co-developed learning resources and published *Our Own Words*, a collaborative book with over 50 lived experience co-authors. More recently they have been involved in supporting and facilitating the co-design of resources and services, co-developing a peer-led program to enhance support for the consumer workforce, contributing to The Leader's Way, and expanding Alternatives to Suicide peer-based mutual support groups. Kath is completing a PhD at the University of NSW, which brings together her passion for collaborative approaches, mental health and physical health, and lived experience leadership.

Kath says, "Like most of us, there are things I feel good about, even great about, but there have also been mistakes and things I would like to have done very differently. Hopefully I have learned and will continue to learn from both".



## Maree Teesson AC CF (1965)

Researcher and  
'a quiet activist'

Maree grew up in a rural community on the Central Coast of NSW. She was keen on learning and encouraged by her parents who valued education.

Being keen on both science and people led her inevitably to study psychology at university. She was hooked on mental health and mental health research.

Maree is the Director of The Matilda Centre at the University of Sydney, an amazing group of over 80 researchers dedicated to mental health and substance use research and is very proud to have developed the centre. She is chair of Australia's Mental Health Think Tank, a Fellow of the Academy of Health and Medical Sciences, a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and a former National Mental Health Commissioner (2018–2021). She received a Churchill Fellowship in 1996 to investigate ways to measure the value of mental health services.

In the early 1990s Maree joined the organising committee of The Mental Health Services conference (TheMHS), Australia's largest learning network in mental health. She has been a board member for over 30 years. This is an incredible network of passionate people, including clinicians, policy developers and people with lived experience. In 2018 she was honoured as a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC).

Maree started in research in 1988. She understood many people in inner city Sydney were homeless and experiencing chronic mental health issues, particularly schizophrenia. "Only 500 metres from my office, a young man named Jonathan died alone from a drug overdose in a refuge for homeless men. Jonathan lived with schizophrenia. Jonathan's mother, Anne Deveson, wrote the book *Tell Me I'm Here* about his life. That book changed the way I thought about the research I was doing and what I was doing to change the world. Jonathan and my research taught me two important lessons: that drugs, alcohol and mental disorders often occurred together with devastating effects; and that we will always be playing catch up if we do not focus our research on prevention and early intervention."

Maree and her team's research is at the forefront of prevention and treatment of mental and substance use disorders, and they have achieved numerous "firsts" in the field. They pioneered innovative treatments and e-health programs focusing on the prevention of alcohol and drug-related harms using internet-delivered, school-based technologies for students in Australia and across the world.

Maree's research has sought to increase our understanding of drug and alcohol and mental disorders, prevent these where possible, and improve treatment responses. She has led over 100 competitively funded grants worth over \$65 million and has had over 300 journal publications. She is most proud of the research done in partnership including her 18-year journey with 615 people with heroin dependence, prevention designed with thousands of young people, and over 2000 Australians sharing their experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. Her quiet activism includes where research changes policy and forms the basis of innovative policy responses, when new services for co-morbidity are introduced, when there are new investments in digital health, or new mental health services, and especially, the development of the Mental Health Think Tank.



## Catherine (Cathy) Conroy (1952)

### Consumer advocate

One of the first activists in regional NSW to raise awareness of postnatal depression, Cathy was one of the earliest appointments to the NSW Consumer Advisory Group.

She describes her childhood and early contact with services: “The course of my life changed in my 20s due to a head injury, a car accident. Subsequent unusual mood swings led me to a GP who prescribed medication that triggered a toxic psychosis in me and led to psychiatric hospitalisations. There has been no cessation of psychotropic medications throughout the years since that time.”

Having studied education and music, Cathy taught in preschools, primary schools, secondary schools and TAFE. As a social educator, she spent 4 years at Goulburn’s Kenmore Psychiatric Hospital (1990–1994) working with patients with dual diagnosis of intellectual disability and mental illness. In 1994 Cathy was appointed the first Mental Health Consumer Advocate for Southern Area Health, and she regards this as her initiation time for deciding to become an activist.

She held this full-time position for 6 years. Cathy’s background in music and education has encompassed a great thirst and longing for the healing of the whole person and to this day it has remained her focus.

Cathy’s writing portrays the immense and ongoing challenges of mental health issues. She has published chapters in *From the Ashes of Experience: Reflections on Madness, Survival and Growth* (Phil Barker, Peter Campbell and Ben Davidson Editors, London 1999) and *Spirituality and Mental Health: Breakthrough* (Phil Barker and Poppy Buchanan-Barker Editors, London 2004); an excerpt in *The Philosophy and Practice of Psychiatric Nursing* (Phil Barker, Newcastle on Tyne 1999); compilations of reflections and prayers in *A Changing Reality through Seasonal Reflection*; and more recently *Our Own Words — Living with Mental*

*Distress and Extreme States and Living without Them* (inside out & associates Editors, Springwood 2019). As a member of a Women’s Taskforce for the Canberra Goulburn Catholic Diocese, Cathy continues to raise awareness of the massive issues surrounding mental health.

Cathy’s interests have influenced her children. Her eldest has established a children’s village in western Kenya in a poverty-stricken community and a Nurture Cottage in Goulburn NSW for children with neurodiversity, emotional and mental health challenges. It is full steam ahead for her two other children including her son who endured early life disruption because of Cathy’s postpartum psychosis.

# 1991–1995

Josephine (Josey) Anderson

Margaret Tobin

Thi Minh Tam Nguyen

Helen Blum

Leonie Manns CF

Desley Casey

Jan Whalan

Annie Sykes

Vivienne Miller

Sandy Watson

Paula Hanlon

Elena Katrakis

Maria Cassaniti

Robyn Shields AM

Beth Kotzé

Donna Stanley

Blossoming  
of activity  
and activism

| 1991                                                                                                                                                                        | 1992                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 1993                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 1994                                                                        | 1995                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>UN released Principles for the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness.</p> <p>First TheMHS Conference.</p> <p>First Commonwealth State Disability Reform Package.</p> | <p>National Community Advisory Group (NCAG) appointed.</p> <p>NSW Community Advisory Group (NSW CAG) appointed.</p> <p>First professional consumer consultants/ advocates employed. (Rozelle Hospital).</p> <p>National Mental Health Policy.</p> <p>Hunter Institute for Mental Health established.</p> <p>Transcultural Mental Health NSW established.</p> <p>National Mental Health Strategy began.</p> | <p>Seminal 'Human Rights &amp; Mental Illness' Report released following National Inquiry.</p> <p>First National Mental Health Plan.</p> <p>MHCC funds the development of Community Consultative Committees (CCC).</p> | <p>Report: 'Lets talk about action'. National Community Advisory Group.</p> | <p>MHCC produces the 'Mental Health Rights Manual'.</p> <p>'Partnership or pretence: Handbook of empowerment and self-advocacy' published.</p> |



Josephine (Josey)  
Anderson  
(1953)

Clinician, teacher,  
researcher

Josey grew up in the eastern suburbs of Sydney.  
As a young adult, she was very sick for 2 years with  
Crohn's Disease.

When she finally received the correct diagnosis and treatment, she gave up her law studies and in 1979 switched to medicine at the then radically new University of Newcastle Medical School. Josey believes that having been a patient with a difficult to diagnose and painful condition made her a better doctor.

Josey says "I probably chose psychiatry because I found the mind truly fascinating, and I also always enjoyed having the time which psychiatry gave me to really talk with and try to understand my patients. One thing that frustrated me, and I think fuelled my activism, was the early realisation that people experiencing mental illness were so discriminated against — and in so many ways — by our healthcare system, by our funding mechanisms, in the media and literature, and by employers."

In 1984 Josey did her internship at the recently opened Westmead Hospital which included a very innovative psychotherapy training program set up by Professor Russell Meares. The program aimed to supervise and teach psychiatry trainees to help a group of patients with borderline personality disorder.

Josey was proud that so many patients gradually recovered and resumed their jobs and their roles as parents and partners with contributing lives.

In 1991 Josey became a Staff Specialist in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Redbank House, the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Westmead Hospital. Josey was the ward director of the Redbank Acute Adolescent Unit from 1997 to 2006. Over that time, with the advocacy of Josey and her colleagues, the NSW government funded a further 70 beds enabling adolescents with severe and often life-threatening mental illness to be cared for in adolescent specific settings staffed by clinicians with expertise in working with young people.

As Director of Child and Youth Mental Health Services for western Sydney from 2008 to 2013 Josey's passion for early intervention and partnerships was often evident. She is most proud of:

- enhancing the Alternate Care Clinic at Redbank House, the state's first specialist mental health clinic for children in out-of-homecare, set up by her friend and colleague Dr Megan Chambers

- establishing at Mt Druitt in western Sydney one of the state's first three programs in early intervention in disruptive behaviour disorder (Got It! or Getting on Track in Time)
- developing the Young People's Outreach Program, another first in western Sydney, in collaboration with the former Richmond Fellowship of NSW (now Flourish Australia)
- leading the establishment of the first three headspace sites in western Sydney in partnership with a consortium led by Uniting Care.

From 2013 to 2018 Josey was Clinical Director at the Black Dog Institute in Randwick and in 2015 became a director of Flourish Australia and member of the board's Clinical Services, Quality and Risk committee.

Since mid 2019 Josey has been Clinical Director at Royal Far West Centre for country children at Manly where she is responsible for clinical governance and the medical management of the flagship Paediatric Development Program. In 2019 the program saw nearly 4,000 rural and remote children and their families and has continued to provide these services remotely throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.



Margaret  
Tobin  
(1952–2002)

Psychiatrist,  
reformer

Margaret was totally committed to reform of mental health services and consumer participation and gained much recognition as a proponent of social justice as a value in the delivery of services.

Margaret came to Australia from the UK with her parents in 1954. She graduated from Mount Lilydale Mercy College in Victoria in 1970 and received a scholarship to study medicine at the University of Melbourne in 1978. She was educated in and practised psychiatry in Victoria. Margaret attracted attention through her efforts to address the corruption, abuse and neglect that had been uncovered in several inquiries into mental hospitals in the early 1990s. She led positive change and instigated reforms in response to the findings.

Because of her track record in initiating reform and insisting on ethical service responses she was appointed to St George Area Health Service in Sydney, later South Eastern Sydney Area Health Service (1993–2000), to lead a similar rejuvenation of mental health services. Her work had a lasting impact in NSW.

As a consequence, in 2001 she was appointed to run South Australia's mental health services and was appointed State Director Mental Health South Australia and Associate Professor in the School of Psychiatry and Psychology at the University of Adelaide.

Margaret's contribution was tragically cut short when she was murdered at work by a disturbed, aggrieved former psychiatry colleague. Her influence on reform of mental health services pervades and continues today. Following her death, various awards and scholarships have been created in her honour, including the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists' Margaret Tobin Award for the College Fellow who has made the most significant contribution to administrative psychiatry in the last 5 years.

She led positive change and instigated reforms in response to the findings.



## Thi Minh Tam Nguyen (1959)

Community  
activist, mental  
health educator

Tam was born in Saigon, Vietnam. In 1988 she came to Australia after two prior failed attempts, which resulted in her becoming a Vietnamese political prisoner.

During this traumatic process, she lost everything including her career. She was isolated from her family and friends, and most tragically, lost her mother while in prison. Even though her future seemed hopeless, Tam kept trying her best to persevere, taking it one day at a time. She has applied the same diligence and perseverance to her work in mental health by adopting the view that as long as you have hope, you can overcome any obstacle.

Tam's occupational journey revolving around mental health began in 1991 as a child support worker for the Indo-Chinese women's refuge. She was there for 5 years before becoming a bilingual mental health worker for South Western Sydney Mental Health Services.

After working closely with the community for over 10 years supporting many Vietnamese carers and consumers, Tam realised there was still much to be done for these groups to improve their mental health and wellbeing. She trained to become a Vietnamese Mental Health First Aid instructor, giving her the opportunity

to use and transfer her knowledge and experiences back to her community. Concurrently with her day job, Tam's passion for the empowerment of the Vietnamese community has led her and community workers to develop a Vietnamese Living Library booklet which was launched in 2020. It includes lived experiences from mental health professionals, consumers and carers, with contact details for a multitude of professionals. Tam hopes it can assist Vietnamese people who are struggling to make their first contact with mental health services.

From 2008 to 2020 Tam delivered 38 Mental Health First Aid courses to 1,500 people including carers, consumers, school parents, women's health centres, elderly associations, scouts and religious groups.

Tam continues to work as a Mental Health Education Officer. In 2020, she took on another role as a Suicide Prevention Peer Worker for the Towards Zero Suicides Initiatives team, which aims to reduce the suicide rate by 20% by 2023.

Although Tam has had numerous achievements and overcome many obstacles throughout her career, her proudest accomplishment has been to start her life afresh and build it from the ground up. This included starting a family and sponsoring her five siblings and father to relocate to Australia, also giving them a chance at a fresh start at life.

Tam said the first 30 years of her life in Vietnam had trained her to become a hard-working person with resilience, enthusiasm, compassion, determination, faith and hope. She then used her next 30 years to share her experiences to help and empower people in need by reaching out to the community, supporting families, carers and consumers. Tam hopes to continue doing this beyond the end of her working career to pay back to the country and communities which kindly accepted her when she felt she had nothing to give.



**Helen  
Blum  
(1946–2012)**  
Consumer leader  
and advocate,  
first coordinator  
of consumer  
consultants

Helen was a pioneer in the consumer movement being the first consumer consultant (peer support worker) in Australia.

She lived with a severe mental health problem, and this was considered an important experiential element of her role. Her integrity and credibility in her work with consumers created a sense of hope and she was seen as a positive role model. Before experiencing mental health issues, Helen had obtained a degree and worked as a schoolteacher.

Helen experienced abuse and trauma in the mental health system which informed her understandings and approach as a consumer advocate. She commenced employment as a consumer worker at Sydney's Rozelle

Hospital in October 1992. Known as the consumer coordinator, she began by working 13 hours per week. In early 1993, six other consumer consultants were employed at Rozelle and were trained by and reported to Helen. This led to consumer consultants being employed throughout Australia. Consumer consultants, now known as peer workers, are now seen as integral to the mental health support system. Peer support workers are currently the fastest growth area of the mental health workforce. Helen was very proud of what she had achieved.

Helen was a passionate advocate for consumer rights, empowerment and ethics in the consumer movement. She brought a strong intellect, passion and commitment to her role and inspired, trained and mentored many consumer peers. In remembrance of Helen's contribution a mental health nursing award in Sydney Local Health District is named after her — The Helen Blum Award for Sharing the Journey with Consumers. It was first awarded in 2020.

Helen experienced abuse and trauma in the mental health system which informed her understandings and approach as a consumer advocate.



## Leonie Manns CF (1948–2019)

Activist and  
consumer leader

Leonie led an interesting and adventurous life before moving into the mental health sector, and brought that intelligence, humour, life experience and enthusiasm with her.

She had success as a teacher and moved around before settling in Sydney. Leonie was highly esteemed as a consumer representative, spokesperson, friend and mentor for many in the sector. She worked in several service areas as an educator, an advisor, a mentor, a policy maker and an administrator. Living with bipolar disorder, Leonie brought a personal perspective to that cocktail of mental illness, social disconnection, substance misuse and disability.

As a person who committed to bring her lived experience into her practices, Leonie exhibited a passion for advocating in the sector and, in particular, for consumer participation and advocacy in the mental health arena. She set out with vigour to make a difference, improve services, and make life better for people living with mental health conditions. This personal goal was not only achieved but surpassed. She became the NSW representative and deputy chair on the National Consumer/Carer Advisory Group, was a board member of NSW Association for Mental Health and Mental Health Australia and was active in the NSW Consumer Advisory

Group. In 1992 she was appointed as a member of the Disability Council of NSW, and later became chair. She is remembered as an influencer across the sector, both nationally and within NSW. She was also a member of the NSW Mental Health Review Tribunal from 1995 until 2016 and remained a member of the Guardianship Division until her death.

She was involved in a broad range of activities, including The Mental Health Services (TheMHS) conference committee, and was appointed to multiple government and non-government committees and policy advisory roles. Leonie was also in demand as an eminent speaker, trainer and spokesperson. Internationally, she served a term as chair of the World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry.

Leonie was the CEO of the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC) of NSW from 1994 to 1998 and left to take up a Churchill Fellowship in 1998 to investigate the provision of consumer driven mental health services in the UK, US and Italy.

Leonie was always very elegant and well dressed and this gave her entrée to high places and influential people. She was an extraordinary networker, astute and politically savvy and had great depth of intellect and knowledge. Leonie was a strong and influential leader of the consumer and lived experience movement from the 1990s to the mid 2000s.

At the time of her retirement Leonie had been a consumer activist for over a decade. She had a proud history of fighting for mental health reform in NSW and, by extension, in Australia. In her private life Leonie had strong links with friends, family and extended families, a love of books, clothes and politics. She was a formidable, passionate, frank and fearless activist and a strong feminist who never stopped advocating for the human rights of all people living with mental illness and psychosocial disability.



Desley  
Casey  
(1956)

Innovator  
and organiser

Desley was born in Queensland. Her childhood was in foster care and that likely made her very self-sufficient.

In her early working life, she was a driver and did office work. After she came to Sydney to live, her interactions with local mental health services led to her meeting her future mentor, Wendy Weir PSM. Wendy was the Director of Mental Health in that area and she saw potential in Desley as a leader. She encouraged and nurtured Desley and her talents. Soon Desley was leading and growing the Northern Beaches Consumer Network. This led to a new initiative, the Pitane consumer centre, a drop in, social and information base for local people living with mental health issues. From these initiatives Desley developed a passion for consumer empowerment and went on to host seminars and conferences and offered supports for consumer participation in the wider mental health environment beyond the local to the state and to other national opportunities.

Known widely as a person who began many consumer initiatives, Desley not only founded the Northern Beaches Consumer Network and Pitane, she went on to create Consumer Activity Network Inc. (CAN), the first consumer operated and managed service provider in NSW. CAN received state

and national funding for their work operating the first warm phone service in Australia, Phone Connections, to assist with social connection and mutual support, and Hospital to Home, a program to support consumers in their first 6 weeks post hospitalisation for two mental health units.

Desley grew to be a well-respected and gifted organiser of consumer events, seminars and conferences. Her influence and achievements were wide ranging; from bookmarks for each of the National Mental Health Service Standards to instigating the creation of the Standards Quilt and co-founding (with Sandy Watson) the NSW Mental Health Consumer Workers Forum. Her fellow consumers were in awe of her remarkable ability to summarise extensive government documents and plans into one to two pages. These were an invaluable resource for many educators and advocates. In raising awareness of the depth and extent of the reforms needed Desley developed many training courses and games for both mental health consumers and staff and was the first qualified trainer for WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) training in Australia.

Desley was a strong proponent for mental health service reform and successfully advocated for people whose voices and rights were not being heeded. Desley was an active board member of a number of organisations including Mental Health Coordinating Council, NSW Consumer Advisory Group and Psychiatric Rehabilitation Australia.

When she left the sector to pursue other work, Desley was missed but fondly remembered because she loved music and laughter and her ever-present cans of Coke.

## Jan Whalan Innovator

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Jan began her career as a pharmacist and, over time, changed direction to become involved in health management.

She held a number of management positions for NSW Health, most recently in senior executive management roles. In late 1992, she became the stimulus for an innovation that has had lasting and significant impact on the national and state mental health workforce.

As Operations Manager at Sydney's Rozelle Psychiatric Hospital in 1992, Jan took the unusual step of inviting a few consumer activists to meet with her to discuss the possibility of employing former patients (known then as consumers) as staff of the hospital. This group formed a committee, meeting regularly with her to design the role. They articulated its purposes and employment conditions and outlined structures to support a consumer workforce. Jan envisioned these consumer staff being able to engage with patients and support them in their efforts to rehabilitate and act as advocates. She was concerned to

hear the voice of the patient and have the users of their services being able to inform therapeutic practices and the development of policies. This small group developed the employment conditions, reasonable adjustments, and the role description for Australia's first peer workers, known then as consumer advocates and consumer consultants.

The first person appointed to this new role, in October 1992, was Helen Blum. Helen recruited additional consumer workers in early 1993 and the consumer workforce, now known as peer workers, has grown from that humble beginning.

Although Jan moved on to other roles and was no longer directly involved in mental health or peer work, it is important to acknowledge the contribution she made in changing the face of the mental health workforce.

In late 1992, she became the stimulus for an innovation that has had lasting and significant impact on the national and state mental health workforce.



Annie  
Sykes  
(1952)  
Advocate  
and activist

Annie was born in Whakatane, Aotearoa New Zealand. Annie identifies as Māori from the Ngatirangitahi iwi and acknowledges a Māreikura Wahine ancestry with past strong and inspirational female leaders. She identifies as a non-binary, lived experience advocate and activist.

Annie is a survivor of being forcibly institutionalised and treated, where her choices and rights were removed. She experienced violence and trauma within her family environment as well as externally within the mental health system.

In 1988, she fled to Australia, escaping a prognosis of “no hope”, to open another chapter of life. By 1992 she became more active in the consumer movement and in 1993 started as a consumer worker in Central Sydney Area Health Service mental health services. Her commitment to addressing stigma and prejudice led her to educate the community, police, schools and university students about the experience of living with a mental health issue as well as its physical and social impacts. She was the first consumer invited to sit on Central Sydney Area Health Service committees on multicultural mental health and was involved in these committees for over 12 years.

Annie won a landmark formal complaint case against Sydney’s Rozelle Hospital for breaching her

confidentiality while a patient there in 1995. By the late 1990s her experience had galvanised her pathway and vision, propelling her into advocacy within mental health reform, social justice and human rights, and seeking a voice at the decision-making table for people with lived experience.

Annie was an early promoter of mental health recovery, developing and publishing a mental health recovery toolkit in the late 1990s. She promoted it at public forums to diverse audiences of consumers, families and clinicians and focused on inclusiveness, respect and acceptance for difference and diversity.

In 2002 she became the Independent Advocate at PRA, (Psychiatric Rehabilitation Australia) reporting directly to the board and supporting people working in PRA’s community businesses. PRA subsequently merged with Richmond Fellowship of NSW (to become RichmondPRA Ltd now Flourish Australia) and Annie continues today as the Senior Independent Advocate in Flourish Australia.

Annie has a great sense of privilege to have survived and holds a deep responsibility to those who have gone before us, who stood up for change and rights. Today we are no longer alone — a long way from her experiences in the 1970s and 1980s. Recently, Annie has begun reclaiming her leadership role, her “mana” in Māori, her “Māreikura” as a Wahine leader in the mental health consumer movement and mental health recovery, which has great cultural significance and meaning for her. She was an invited speaker at the 2021 Australian New Zealand Society of the History of Medicine Conference in Newcastle, describing her contribution to the consumer and mental health recovery movements, and her escape in 1988.

Annie describes her most significant achievements as her escape to Australia; developing and promoting the Recovery Toolkit; and receiving an apology and full accountability for wrongdoing from Rozelle Hospital, with acknowledgement of her professionalism throughout the process.



**Vivienne  
Miller  
(1948)**

**Community mental  
health educator,  
occupational therapist**

Vivienne was born in Perth, Western Australia. During Vivienne's teens her mother worked for one of the few female psychiatrists there, making this her first contact with mental health.

Her second contact occurred when her mother developed a deep depression and required psychiatric help. She also remembers a cousin, who, as a patient in a psychiatric hospital, was used to teach medical students, one of whom was his brother. This struck Vivienne as totally traumatic and out of order.

Vivienne trained as an occupational therapist and later completed further education in adult learning, so describes herself as an educator first and clinician second. Her psychiatry lecturer was warm, wise, charismatic and erudite, and provided Vivienne with her first positive mental health role model.

Two jobs influenced Vivienne's path. In 1970, when working in Canberra she joined the in-service training course for the first community-based mental health service in Australia. Later, in Oxford, UK, she worked at the Radcliffe Hospital in one of the first mental health crisis services. The team were first responders and were responsible for assessing people in the emergency department after a suicide attempt. With outstanding supervision, Vivienne learnt about taking responsibility for her work —

learning that the “buck stops here”. In the 1970s in England she learnt about supervision, dramathrapy, psychodrama, crisis intervention, group therapy, large groupwork and psychodynamic therapy. The 1980s in Sydney were years of learning about creative arts therapies, student supervision, lecturing, project management, integrated mental health services and mental health service standards.

In the 1990s Vivienne was involved with introducing quality improvement into Sydney's Macquarie (Psychiatric) Hospital and ran a site visit program under the National Mental Health Strategy for three mental health services in northern Sydney.

In the early 1990s Vivienne became involved in the development of what is now The Mental Health Services conference (TheMHS). In 1991 the first TheMHS conference was held at Glenside Psychiatric Hospital in Adelaide. This was an inclusive conference for professional disciplines, consumers and families, where all stakeholders were included and integral. The Mental Health Services Achievement Awards were initiated in

1992. Consumer and carer/family fora, organised by and for consumers and for carers, began soon afterwards.

Vivienne retired as founding TheMHS Executive Director in July 2020, but remains a board member of TheMHS Learning Network Inc. She is currently an executive member of the World Association for Psychiatric Rehabilitation Australia and is co-convenor of the steering committee for the Museum of the Mind, Sydney.

Apart from her work with TheMHS, Vivienne is most proud of being involved in the development of the first set of mental health standards in Australia (the Area Integrated Mental Health Service Standards for NSW) and further contributing to the first set of Australian National Standards for Mental Health Services. She was a consultant to the project developing the first Australian National Practice Standards for the Mental Health Workforce and consultant to the second set of standards. She also chaired the Network for Exploring Creativity and Therapy through the Arts (NECTA) for 30 years.



Sandy  
Watson  
(1957)

Consumer  
consultant/  
contractor

Known as a passionate and fearless advocate, consumer educator and activist, Sandy came to NSW from Timaru in New Zealand.

Sandy describes herself as a person with extensive lived experience of mental distress who left the mental health system as a service user because she believed in something much better than what was on offer.

Sandy has committed herself to providing services as a consumer advocate and consumer educator. She achieves this through her passion for designing and delivering education and learning informed by consumer perspectives. Sandy was in the first group of consumer consultants employed in Australia at Sydney's Rozelle Hospital in 1993 under the guidance of Helen Blum. This role was pioneering in Australia, and Sandy relished the opportunity to provide effective consumer advocacy to patients. While at Rozelle Sandy established the NSW Consumer Peer Workers forum for the public sector consumer workforce that still meets annually. There was a need for consumer consultants in NSW to network, to share with one another, to keep track of how many of

them there were, and to advocate collectively on consumer workforce issues as well as service user needs. Sandy is proud of this achievement because it has been enduring and has benefitted many members of the consumer and peer workforce in NSW over many years.

In the mid 1990s Sandy founded Umbrella, a support group for mad people operating in Bondi Junction in eastern Sydney which met fortnightly for 5 years. She published a monthly subscription newsletter called "Kangaroos in the Top Paddock" for 5 years. It had information on rights and upcoming events, and provided a platform for consumers to submit articles, illustrations, cartoons, poetry and consumer perspective critique. Umbrella provided peer support in a safe environment. Sandy was appointed the inaugural Area Consumer Coordinator for the South Eastern Area Health Service in the late 1990s, supporting and promoting consumer participation initiatives.

Recognising psychosocial disability, the Disability Council of NSW appointed Sandy as a member in the mid 1990s to engage in systemic advocacy. Sandy was known for strongly advocating for the access needs of people living with psychosocial disability. She provided psychosocial disability awareness training to the NSW Attorney General's Department and to the NSW Legislative Assembly, providing workshops to a wide range of workers including sheriffs, court clerks, electorate officers and other staff.

Since 2011 Sandy has been a co-director of the business inside out & associates australia, providing consultancy services drawing on lived experience knowledge and expertise and co-designing and delivering innovative training in a range of topic areas. Since 2020, she has been coordinating and co-delivering the inaugural Consumer Perspective Supervision training in Victoria.



**Paula  
Hanlon  
(1965)**

**Peer support  
worker, advocate,  
educator**

Paula was born in Sydney. Her childhood, adolescence and early adulthood were filled with compounding traumas.

Alcohol abuse and other self-harming behaviours were an integral part of Paula's early life, and her first psychiatric assessment was at age 14 following a suicide attempt. Inpatient admissions, including electro convulsive treatments and seclusion and restraint experiences, began from age 18. During her unwell years as an adult, Paula could not sustain employment or meaningful relationships. Recovery began when she achieved continuing sobriety from February 1992 and was introduced to a psychologist who worked with her on healing from her many traumas.

Paula's journey into engaging with mental health reform began in January 1995 when she joined the Ryde Consumer Network. Paula found a place where she was respected, needed, and had a purpose. Paula developed skills and confidence to participate in systemic advocacy activities. She says that for the first few years "I could not raise my head and with my eyes lowered to the ground I would often fall. I had to learn to raise my head, connect with other people's eyes and open my mouth to speak with volume". Those early days

were great for learning and personal development opportunities. "The experiences that led me to mental health services, the strength I gained from efficient and effective clinical care and the value of participating in systemic reform continue to motivate my personal and professional development."

Entering the profession of peer worker in January 1998 was a complete reversal of her earlier employment experiences. This time her mental health experiences were an essential criterion where previously she had been refused or had lost jobs due to her mental health issues. Paula is still in this role.

From 1995 to 2005, Paula completed a BA majoring in psychology at Macquarie University. "I was proud at my graduation as I had never considered I would complete a university degree. I have chosen to not work as a psychologist, but I do benefit in my work because of my education. I love quality processes, developing, implementing, and reporting evaluations." Since 1999, Paula has been a surveyor (now called

assessor) with the Australian Council on Health Care Standards, travelling across Australia reviewing mental health and other health services against national standards. This work was a natural progression from her systemic advocacy undertaken at the local level.

Paula has been an educator since the 1990s with the Occupational Therapy School at Western Sydney University, the Nursing School at the University of Technology Sydney, and various training programs with the Health Education and Training Institute (HETI). She has been a director on the board of TheMHS Learning Network since 1999, was the first consumer-dedicated director position with the former Richmond Fellowship of NSW (2007–2011) and has been a director of Flourish Australia since 2015.

A passionate Paula says, "I have the best career within mental health and am grateful for the many people who have honoured me with sharing their journeys".



Elena  
Katrakis  
(1962)

Social worker,  
service innovator

## Elena received her Bachelor of Social Work from the University of NSW in 1983.

After a social work placement in a mental health unit, she found a path and passion by committing to working with some of the most vulnerable people in NSW. In the mid 1980s she worked at Macquarie Hospital at North Ryde, then at the Kings Cross Community Mental Health Centre, the Mental Health Advocacy Service and the Health Care Complaints Commission. In 1992 she began her interest in activism when she joined NSW Health as a policy officer and in 1993 moved into a policy role with the Centre for Mental Health at NSW Health.

Elena worked very closely with Professor Beverley Raphael AM and held key responsibilities for the development of the first NSW Aboriginal Mental Health Policy (1997) in partnership with a broad-based working group chaired by Pat Swan (Delaney) and Professor Marie Bashir AD.

Elena led the negotiations of the first Memorandum of Understanding between NSW Police, NSW Health and NSW Ambulance on the transport of people with a mental illness. She was also deeply involved in the development of the innovative statewide Boarding House Strategy and coordination of assessments for all residents of licensed boarding houses together with the Central Sydney Boarding House Team and the NSW Department of Ageing and Disability.

Elena is also proud of her contribution to the first Joint Guarantee of Service between NSW Health and Housing NSW to better support people living with a mental illness to access and retain tenancies in social and community housing. From this initiative emerged the landmark Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI), which is recognised and evaluated as a highly successful

solution to the housing and support problems for people with persistent mental health issues, and which remains one of the foundation programs in NSW.

Elena worked again with Beverley Raphael AM to develop a statewide immediate mental health crisis response to the 9/11 tragedy in 2001, coordinating all Area Directors of Mental Health to respond appropriately. Since 2006 Elena has been CEO of Carers NSW.

Elena has continued to be driven by her strong commitment to social justice and developing strong and sustainable solutions to create and enable a better life for those who are the most vulnerable.



Maria  
Cassaniti  
(1969)

Multicultural  
advocate and  
change leader

Maria was born in Sydney and raised in a quintessential Italian migrant family who settled in Sydney's inner west during the 1950s.

Her early years were rich and diverse, and importantly included experiencing the impacts of mental ill health and psychological distress in her own family and observing its manifestations in other households.

During her university years Maria's burgeoning appreciation of cultural nuances and her own experiences with overt or subtle ethnic and racial prejudice within communities and inside health and social care service systems left her perturbed, as it contradicted the multicultural ethos from her public school education.

Maria started her first social work position in 1991, at the then Gladesville Hospital which soon after amalgamated with Macquarie Hospital. She entered the mental health sector in a galvanising period of reform, following the 1983 Report of the Inquiry into Health Services for the Psychiatrically Ill and Developmentally Disabled (the Richmond Report) and the 1993 Report of the National Inquiry into the Human Rights of People with Mental Illness (the Burdekin Report). These high-level directions inspired Maria, as she was confronted by the remnants of the archaic, inhumane and dilapidated system she was working in.

In her early career, Maria worked across various mental health units, with a growing interest in the intersection of migrant and refugee histories along with people's journeys of mental illness and psychological distress complicated by culture and linguistic barriers. In 1995 she moved to work in western Sydney in a newly established statewide service, the Transcultural Mental Health Centre (TMHC). She was appointed as a clinical consultant and tasked with establishing the first ever consumer and carer mental health network for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD). This work resulted in a nationally funded exploration of mental health consumer participation in a culturally diverse society through the lived experiences of consumers and carers.

Maria's work has purposively covered a broad remit to safeguard both the integration of transcultural mental health strategies in systemwide reform and cascading targeted initiatives. Thirty years on, Maria has navigated her area of interest with finesse, relentless dedication and an enduring energy. As the

centre manager, she continues to steer the TMHC together with a new generation of leaders, augmenting new understandings of transcultural mental health. Her key achievements include providing wide-ranging input into state and national advisory groups on transcultural mental health and on the advancement of culturally safe and responsive mental health services, leading and modelling what culturally safe and responsive services look like, and bedding down the TMHC service model, ensuring its activities remain multi-pronged.

Proud moments for Maria include multiple team awards and acknowledgements and leading a very diverse workforce with vision and purpose. Her proudest career moments include being entrusted with leading the TMHC, her appointment as a member of the Mental Health Commission of NSW's inaugural Community Advisory Council and working collectively as a board member of TheMHS with its many collaborators on thought-provoking topics which have broadened the boundaries of theoretical and grounded knowledge about mental health care and mental health systems.



## Robyn Shields AM

Proud Bunjalung woman, clinician, activist

Robyn is a proud descendant of the Bunjalung nation and grew up mostly in Queensland with her parents.

Her home overlooked one of the largest mental asylums for the ‘criminally insane’ surrounded by high barbed wire fences. This centre was never talked about at home or among the community. After high school, she left Queensland to work in NSW in health and found herself working in a large ‘asylum’. It was only then she realised what lay behind the silence of the barbed wire fence. For the first time she saw the lives of people who suffered from major mental illness which was an awakening experience that started her journey into working with people suffering in this way.

Along this journey Robyn has faced many confronting challenges, notably the lack of awareness of the difficulties in providing trauma-informed mental health services to a large population of Aboriginal people in the local area in which she worked. The evidence clearly showed there was very little mainstream support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Her understanding of Aboriginal mental health issues was highlighted and reinforced at the first national conference on Aboriginal mental health in Sydney in 1993.

Over her career, Robyn has worked tirelessly in her day-to-day work to communicate and educate mainstream services about the fundamental shortages of mainstream services for a distressed community who are experiencing marginalisation, misunderstandings and misdiagnoses resulting in mistreatments. With mainstream support and support from the local Aboriginal Medical Services, she helped develop in partnership a mental health service in the then Central Sydney Area Health Service (now known as Sydney Local Health District) that recognised and assisted in overcoming barriers for Aboriginal people using mental health services. She had many mentors and support which helped the community to address the loss and grief and overcome the suspicion of mainstream services.

In 2005 Robyn completed a degree in medicine at the University of Sydney and is now studying to become a psychiatrist. Robyn has been recognised in her field. In 2002 Robyn was awarded the Centenary of Federation Medal and in 2004 was honoured as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM). In 2013 she was

appointed as an inaugural Deputy Commissioner to the Mental Health Commission of NSW for 6 years. In 2015 she was recognised as one of Westpac’s 100 women of influence in Australia. In 2019 she began a career in forensic psychiatry and has continued to work with some of the most disadvantaged people in the mental health system. Robyn has also served as a member of the NSW Mental Health Review Tribunal.

Robyn is proud of playing a small part in addressing the needs of disadvantaged and marginalised groups. She recognises and acknowledges the work many have done in the past and remains committed to strive for changes to humanise the way forward.



Beth  
Kotzé  
(1959)

Clinician,  
reformer

Beth was born in Sydney and grew up in the western suburbs.

She spent her summer holidays between school and university working at the old Hope Hostel for homeless men established on the site of the Cumberland Hospital in Parramatta, later to become the site of the Institute of Psychiatry and the Health Education and Training Institute (HETI). Much has changed over the years.

Beth attended the University of Sydney in the late 1970s for her medical undergraduate degree — the first of either side of her family to be university educated. She later completed specialty training in psychiatry, child and adolescent psychiatry and psychotherapy. There was a tremendous sense of optimism and reform, and a strong belief that the lives of people with mental illness could be and must be improved. She wanted to contribute and became interested in how systems work and the importance of policy in changing the status quo. She felt that she could contribute to system design and how the system worked and completed further training in medical administration.

Beth is proud of big achievements, especially those that are part of new ways of seeing things and creating something that did not exist before. This includes leading large public mental health services through periods of significant service development and reform. For example, in 1995 she was privileged to lead the opening of the first acute inpatient unit for adolescents in NSW, later establishing a new early intervention service for young people with psychosis in 1997 and being the major service partner in the establishment in 2011 of Project Air (a service development and training program for health workers to assist in the support of people with a personality disorder). It also includes seeing opportunities for innovation and policy development and always seizing those moments and persisting despite bureaucratic obstacles. Leading the policy design for Mums and Kids Matter remains a significant achievement as does leading the inception of the Pathways to Community Living Initiative, both around 2015 and 2016. Beth remains committed to clinical and teaching roles and draws inspiration and

purpose from working with children and adolescents experiencing difficult times in their lives and training the next generation of psychiatrists. She thinks of her work as a vocation.

Looking back over the last 40 years, Beth sees herself as being on a journey of determined doing, giving hope, and standing up for what you believe in a system that still needs to be reminded about the importance of good mental health services and treatments that can make a difference to people's lives. Mental health as a service sector has come far over this time, emerging from deep shadows with increased attention and investment from government and hope for people to live their best lives, but there is still much more to be done especially in the areas of responsive services and early intervention for children and adolescents.



Donna Stanley  
(1967)

Proud Gunggari  
Umbi, community  
developer, educator

## Donna Stanley is a proud Gunggari Umbi from Mitchell in south west Queensland.

When Donna was born at Roma in 1967 her family was living at the Mitchell Yumba in a dirt floor humpy with corrugated tin walls.

Donna now works on the lands of the Wiradjuri people in Orange as the District Coordinator Aboriginal Mental Health Drug and Alcohol with the Western NSW Local Health District.

Donna has extensive experience improving whole of life outcomes for Aboriginal people across a wide range of settings and circumstances and has worked in the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing area for over 25 years. This has included developing, supporting and implementing policy at both the state and national levels. Her commitment and dedication to improving mental health outcomes for Aboriginal people was recognised when she was nominated and became a finalist in the 2019 National Mental Health Award.

Donna has worked with and supported Aboriginal Mental Health Drug and Alcohol trainees in Western NSW Local Health District for the past 14 years. Donna always tells her trainees to “treat every person you work with as if they are your family member, provide them with the care that you would expect if it was you or your family member”.

On a personal level Donna has experienced mental health and social and emotional wellbeing issues in her family and community. Her lived experience started early in her life with the loss of a family member to suicide when she was just six years old. Her family also experienced the trauma of the Stolen Generations with her grandfather being removed from family and the ongoing transgenerational trauma of depression, anxiety, suicidality and drug and alcohol problems this has had and continues to have on generations of family members. Donna’s brother died from suicide in the early 1990s and Donna believes that his death brought her on the journey into the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing space.

Some of Donna’s achievements include:

- National Coordinator of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid Program
- Cultural Consultant to the NSW Audit Office in the development of the report on mental health service planning for Aboriginal people in NSW, a report that influenced the development of the NSW Aboriginal Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020–2025
- Co-lead on the COVID-19 response for Aboriginal people across Western NSW Local Health District.

Donna is most proud of being able to provide Aboriginal people with the care they have a right to. She says, “I am known for being a strong advocate for Aboriginal people within the mainstream mental health system for both staff and those needing to access services”.

# 1996–2000

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Gwen Scotman-Challenger

Tina Smith

Karin Lines PSM

Robyn Murray

Leone Crayden

Jenna Bateman

Fay Jackson

Jaelea Skehan OAM

Karen Burns

Toni Garretty

Jackie Curtis

## Consolidation of reforms

| 1996                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 1997                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 1998                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 1999                      | 2000                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Australian Mental Health Consumer Network (AMHCN) established (1996–2008).</p> <p>WHO Mental Health Care Law: 10 Basic principles.</p> <p>National Standards for mental health services.</p> <p>50th Anniversary- Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW).</p> <p>50th Anniversary- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZP).</p> | <p>Second National Mental Health plan.</p> <p>Early Intervention Network for Mental Health in Young People or “AusEinet” established.</p> <p>50th Anniversary of World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH).</p> <p>‘Every boundary broken: Sexual abuse of women patient in psychiatric institutions’ report is released.</p> <p>Mental Health Council of Australia established.</p> | <p>‘Caring for mental health: A framework for mental health care in NSW’ is published by NSW Health.</p> <p>NSW Boarding House Reform Project begins.</p> <p>‘The KIT — A guide to the advocacy we choose to do’ launched.</p> | <p>GST is introduced.</p> | <p>Millennium is celebrated amid fears of “Y2K bug”.</p> |



## Gwen Scotman- Challenger (1949)

### Consumer advocate

Gwen was born in Kogarah in southern Sydney.  
She came to mental health in a roundabout way.

As a student nurse in the late 1960s she did two rotations in mental health, was not impressed and vowed “never again”. Life and its irony saw her needing exactly that kind of help. After many broken, traumatic years, Gwen was asked by a mental health organisation to be their representative on a South Western Sydney Mental Health Community Consultative Committee. At that time Gwen knew virtually nothing of the consumer movement, consumer participation or of advocacy. But it was here where she realised the power of the consumer voice. She relished learning, particularly how to use policy to ensure that services were conforming to policy and becoming more responsive to people in the services, and services becoming better attuned to people’s needs.

By 1997 she was asked by consumers to be on the committee, did a consumer advocacy course and began to voraciously learn from those who had gone before. She was

employed as a peer worker in 1998. Gwen says, “I have been, and am, an activist, advocate, educator and consultant. For this, some sometimes see me as an unwelcome agitator. I chose to do peer work when I saw horrific rights abuse in mental health services.”

Gwen was a NSW delegate for the Australian Mental Health Consumer Network for 8 years. She founded, with a few peers, the short-lived South West Sydney Mental Health Consumer Network and, from that, a number of people started their recovery journey. She is most proud of the introduction of multicultural peer workers into her mental health service. In southwestern Sydney over half of the people accessing services were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This ultimately led to the translation of the Mental Health Act Rights booklet into eight community languages. Gwen says she is most proud of raising her family.

As a student nurse  
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vowed “never again”.



**Tina  
Smith  
(1965–2020)**

**Clinician, advocate  
and activist**

Tina was born in Newcastle and died there in 2020 after a short illness.

She is remembered for her passionate and articulate advocacy and activism for the rights of people with mental ill health. She studied psychology and behavioural science in the 1990s both here and in San Diego in the United States. After 10 years living in the United States, where she worked in a range of community mental health settings, she returned to Australia and commenced work at Hunter Health in 1997 where she coordinated a supported accommodation project and later managed Community Development and Partnerships. Tina left Hunter Health in 2003 and was Regional Manager (Hunter) with the Richmond Fellowship NSW (now Flourish Australia) for 3 years.

The last 13 years of Tina's career were spent at the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC) where

she brought the full weight of her passion, intellect, advocacy and writing skills to the fore. Her main areas of work were workforce and sector development. A major outcome of this work was recognition of how important language was to recovery-orientated practice. The *Recovery Orientated Language Guide* (2013) is a very good example of Tina honing in on a fundamental issue requiring redress. She was also an excellent presenter and was able to transfer information to an audience like few can. She articulated what many felt but could not put into words.

At the end of her career Tina's title was Policy Advisor, Workforce and Sector Development but it could just as well have been Policy Advisor, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) because this was her passion in

her last 5 years at MHCC. The inclusion of psychosocial disability under the NDIS saw a very different community sector emerge as NDIS funding brought new ways of operating and new providers to the sector. Her work on defining psychosocial disability in relation to the NDIS, *Further Unravelling Psychosocial Disability* (2015), was a labour of love for Tina and a key document in the national discourse on mental health and the NDIS.

Advocates and activists like Tina are to be treasured whether with us now or not. More than anything, her contribution was to push the boundaries, to stand up and state the issues clearly with, and on behalf of, those less able to do so.

She is remembered for her passionate and articulate advocacy and activism for the rights of people with mental ill health.



## Karin Lines PSM (1947)

**Clinician, educator,  
mental health  
service executive**

Karin was born in Henty in south western NSW and although she moved to Sydney in early childhood, she maintained a love of the natural bushland.

Karin has had many different roles during her long career in mental health including nursing, policy development, service development and planning, academic teaching, and many leadership positions, including Executive Director Mental Health Branch, NSW Ministry of Health (2015–2019).

Karin's first experiences as a trainee psychiatric nurse of the treatment of people with a lived experience of mental illness, particularly women, influenced her drive for compassion, ethics and equality to be the foundations of any mental health service.

Karin's interest in ethics and feminism prompted her to undertake a PhD in the philosophy of psychiatry at the University of Sydney, and the ethics and mental health program at the Centre for Values, Ethics and Law. She also has an Honours degree in philosophy, and a Master's degree with Distinction in mental health nursing.

She has contributed to many national and state mental health committees and has influenced mental health reform at the regional, state and national level, dating from her work at Wentworth Area Health Service (now Nepean Blue Mountains) in the late 1990s.

In the early 2000s Karin worked to develop an integrated child protection and violence prevention service in outer metropolitan Sydney that forged strong relationships with local drug and alcohol, mental health services, and the hospital emergency department. She also developed an Interpersonal Violence Prevention Plan for the local Area Health Service, based on the WHO strategy.

In recent years Karin has worked with Support Act, a charity for musicians and others in the music industry, to develop a prevention program and mental health helpline for people in the music industry who can be vulnerable to mental health challenges and typically do not access mainstream services.

In 2018, Karin was awarded the Public Service Medal for outstanding public service to mental health care in NSW.

Karin is most proud of her work with Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network (2009–2015) which included managing and improving the NSW Forensic Mental Health and Correctional Mental Health Services. People in contact with these systems are among the most disadvantaged in our society and she believes it is imperative to continue to advocate for social justice and for reform of these services.



**Robyn  
Murray  
(1954)**

**Social worker,  
innovator**

While she was born in Sydney, Robyn spent her early childhood years in the country. Robyn returned to Sydney for high school and university graduating as a social worker.

Seminal moments for Robyn included placements at the Richmond Fellowship's half-way house in Glebe, the Prince of Wales Hospital where clinicians were using the work of R.D. Laing to establish Pala, a therapeutic community approach to mental illness, and in her final year at university being part of a students' strike to bargain for course reform in social work.

"I remember being in the back of a VW with Gary Moore (later head of NCOSS (NSW Council of Social Services)) driving down to the *Sydney Morning Herald* Broadway offices with photos and a story that made the front page the next day and we immediately got our formal inquiry established."

In her clinical positions Robyn was fortunate to work with skilled mentors. As a social worker in the 1980s at the former Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital at Camperdown, Robyn learnt the value of regular clinical supervision and of working in a multidisciplinary team. Robyn and a colleague facilitated the first therapy groups with girls who were survivors of childhood sexual abuse. She then

worked with Louise Voigt who was developing innovative foster care services before Louise went on to head Barnardo's. In the early 1990s, in a diagnostic team for children with learning difficulties, Robyn further learnt the importance of holistic assessments and case formulation. Moving into adult mental health, Robyn worked in community teams in rural areas and in the late 1990s and early 2000s, in strategic development roles in South East Sydney with Dr Margaret Tobin and in the NSW Department of Health with Professor Beverley Raphael AM.

During these years, Robyn managed, with her colleagues, the development and funding of groundbreaking programs including the early NSW Older People's Mental Health Program, the Family and Carers Program, the Vocational, Education, Training and Employment Program, and in 2003 the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI), now a program with government investment of over \$45 million and 1,500 places.

As part of the next wave of mental health reform, Robyn is leading the Pathways to Community Living Initiative (PCLI) in the NSW Ministry of Health. It is a major initiative to improve the health and wellbeing of people living with protracted mental illness. It aims to fundamentally reform and improve how we care for and support people who have had long stays in NSW hospitals because of severe mental illness. Evaluation has demonstrated that PCLI is changing systemwide practice through collaborative planning with service users and families; multidisciplinary care planning with comprehensive assessments; organisational support and strategic leadership; a clear vision; and a long-term multi-modal approach.



**Leone  
Crayden  
(1960)**

**Clinician,  
advocate,  
leader**

Leone was born in western Sydney and was first introduced to the mental health system as an infant when her mother's closest sister, Valerie, was hospitalised at Callan Park Hospital after the loss of her newborn baby.

Leone's mother and her grandmother, always accompanied by Leone, visited Valerie every weekend at Callan Park until Valerie was moved to Parramatta Mental Hospital when Leone was nine years old. There were times when these visits were traumatic for her family, as Valerie was unrecognisable after too much medication or electro convulsive treatments or when she had been brutally injured by unknown persons. Valerie eventually moved into an Aftercare Association House in Ashfield where she found employment, independence and good care from this organisation.

Many years later after studying nursing, Leone became aware of the work of the non-government sector and was drawn to work with people living with mental illness who could be supported like her Aunty Valerie in the community. This led Leone to become an advocate for the work of the non-government sector and for an

increase in the amount of supported accommodation available to people who needed care and support. This motivation steered Leone to take on a more active role in lobbying for support especially in rural and regional areas of NSW. She became a board member of the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC) and was chair from 2003 to 2010. During her tenure the MHCC Learning and Development Unit was established, and the Peer Worker Course was approved. One of the sector's and Leone's ambitions of embedding supported accommodation as a leading partnership program within NSW was realised and the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) was established. It has become a world-renowned program.

Leone is proud of her work in mental health both as co-chair of the NSW Ministry of Health's Agency of Clinical Innovation and as CEO leading a small regional NGO with annual funding of

\$75,000 to become an organisation specialising in mental health and housing with annual income of \$20 million and over \$48 million of housing properties for people who are marginalised in our community. Leone still believes in the work of the community managed organisation sector and continues to advocate for the sector to be front and centre in supporting people with mental health conditions.



**Jenna  
Bateman  
(1958)**

**Clinician,  
advocate,  
activist**

Jenna grew up in Sydney's northern beaches and commenced psychiatric nurse training at the then Callan Park Hospital in 1980.

At that time the future of psychiatry was thought to lie in finding new medications to adjust problems with “brain chemistry” and nurses were told to “reality base” “their” patients who were without “insight”. That patients had futures outside the hospital was not an expectation in most wards. Hope was a scarce commodity. Importantly, however, it was also in the 1980s that the term “mental health” became established, allowing a greater recognition of social factors and supports.

Jenna's experiences as a trainee nurse at Callan Park (1980–1983) are always with her. When she became Nursing Unit Manager at Caritas St Vincent's Sydney in 1994, two issues stood out for her as critical and motivated her throughout her career: why do so many people keep returning to hospital and why are the abuse histories of so many effectively silenced. Motivated by high readmission rates at Caritas, in 1999 she undertook a research project to map the mental health NGO sector in NSW and report on its performance. As part of that project she introduced outcome measurement to the NSW community sector using both an assessment of need and a disability tool.

In 2000 Jenna was appointed CEO of the project's auspice body, the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC). She successfully advocated for sector development funds, which became the NGO Development Strategy 2004–2007. It established a voluntary minimum training qualification for the sector, widespread uptake of outcome measures and promoted partnerships within and across sectors.

Following on from the NGO Development Strategy and, although controversial for a peak body, MHCC became a Registered Training Organisation. With guidance and input from people with lived experience, it designed accredited training based on recovery principles. These materials were made freely available to other training providers and set the industry standard for the Certificate IV Mental Health and later the Certificate IV Peer Work qualification. Parallel to this work was promotion of the concept and language of social inclusion in *Social Inclusion – Its Importance to Mental Health* (2007) and recovery-orientated practice in *Philosophy into Practice – A Workforce Development Guide* (2008). It was important that there was a language for the work of these organisations. The terms social

inclusion and recovery-orientated practice gave a profile, character and identity to work of community organisations which was previously poorly defined.

Growth and establishment of the community sector was also happening in other states and territories and in 2007 Jenna advocated creation of a formal alliance of state peaks that became Community Mental Health Australia.

Over a 35-year career in mental health Jenna has witnessed and been part of a strong reform agenda. In addition to her work in sector development she is most proud of her part in driving the recognition and adoption of trauma-informed care and practice in *Trauma Informed Care and Practice* (2013). The MHCC *Trauma Informed Care and Practice* conference in 2011 with 500 delegates brought multiple social service sectors together and complex trauma into the open. A far cry from her experience in the 1990s, Jenna now feels some confidence that people with abuse histories seeking help will have their experience believed and the impact of their trauma recognised and respected.



## Fay Jackson (1960)

**Lived experience  
advocate, activist,  
public speaker,  
writer**

Fay grew up on a farm in the Southern Highlands of NSW. She experienced sexual abuse as a child and young woman.

The long-term psychological distress of these experiences led to further trauma through enforced treatment, loss of human and civil rights, loss of dignity and sense of being valued. After the death of her brother, who had the same psychiatric diagnosis as Fay, she was committed to raise awareness. She became immersed in improving the mental health and human rights of people who have experienced trauma and traumatic mental health treatment.

Fay says she has increasingly come to the belief that our mental health issues are not illnesses but on a normal spectrum of responses to trauma. Fay also feels that society and some clinicians cling to the idea of diagnosis and illness because this maintains the notion that the problem is the individual and not societal.

In 1999, Fay became the first mental health lived experience speaker for the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund. In 2000, she became the first lived experience speaker for BeyondBlue and ambassador, trainer and speaker for Sane Australia and the Black Dog Institute. Fay trained people with lived experience of trauma and mental health issues in how to

purposefully and effectively tell their stories to break down the myths and confront discrimination around mental illness.

In 2000, at the age of 40, Fay acquired her first paid role as a consumer consultant/peer worker in the mental health services for South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra/Shoalhaven. She became the Manager of Peer Workers and then the Director of Consumer, Carer and Community Affairs in 2002. In 2004, she founded her own company, Vision in Mind, as a mental health consultancy and training service.

In 2012 Fay was appointed as a Deputy Commissioner (Lived Experience) with the Mental Health Commission of NSW. In her 6 years in this role, she contributed substantially to the Living Well Strategic Plan (2014), the Lived Experience Framework (2018) and The Hub, an online resource for peer work.

In 2014, Fay was appointed General Manager, Inclusion, a designated lived experience executive role with Flourish Australia. Fay is proud of her contribution to designing and driving the 'Why Not A Peer Worker?' Strategy

in Flourish Australia. This strategy has led Flourish Australia to employ a large and ever-increasing number of peer workers. Fay is also proud that she has been a major influence on increasing recognition of the value and wisdom of lived experience, and the number of peer workers and other designated lived experience roles across Australia and internationally.

Fay has appeared on the ABC One Plus One and Q&A shows. In her career, she is most proud of advancing the Mad Pride Movement in Australia and encouraging people with lived experience to recognise that they are valuable and deserve to live a life that fulfils their human and civil rights including the right to be employed, to have good physical and mental health care and to be responsible members of families and communities.

She has consistently raised the issue of poor physical health and the appalling life expectancy gap in people with mental health issues. Her advocacy led her to actively contribute to the development of the *Being Equally Well Roadmap* (Mitchell Institute and Victoria University, 2021).



## Jaelea Skehan OAM (1975)

**Psychologist,  
suicide prevention,  
mental health  
promotion**

Jaelea grew up in Newcastle in NSW and has built her career as a respected leader in the prevention of mental ill health and the prevention of suicide from her regional hometown.

Jaelea is a psychologist, researcher and knowledge translator with a passion for building the capacity of individuals, families, services and communities to be involved in mental health and suicide prevention. She started her work and her commitment to mental health in 2000 and has been engaged in clinical, teaching, policy and project roles. She went on to complete a PhD focused on suicide prevention.

Jaelea was appointed as the first female Director of Everymind in 2012, led the National Suicide Prevention Taskforce in 2019 and 2020, supporting the work of the Prime Minister's Adviser on Suicide Prevention, and lent her knowledge and skills to a number of local, state and national advisory groups. Jaelea has worked across a range of settings and sectors and has

been instrumental in the development of flagship programs recognised nationally and internationally, including national work with the media under the national Mindframe program, which supports safe media reporting, portrayal and communication about suicide, mental ill health, alcohol and other drugs.

In 2014 Jaelea was announced as one of Australia's 100 Women of Influence by Westpac and the *Australian Financial Review*, a national honour highlighting the important contribution women make in creating a bold and diverse future for Australia. In 2020 she was honoured with a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for services to community mental health and wellbeing and received the University of Newcastle Alumni Award for Regional Leadership.

Over her 20 years in mental health and suicide prevention Jaelea has seen a shift from a health service only response to mental health and suicide prevention to an emerging whole of government and whole of community approach that recognises the integral role of lived experience knowledge and leadership. Jaelea believes in designing solutions with people, bringing together different knowledge for greatest impact and for scaling up what we know works for people and their families.



## Karen Burns (1962)

**Clinician, promoter  
of coordinated care**

Karen was born in Sydney to British parents. A family member experienced a severe and persistent mental health issue and spent his adult life at Broughton Hall within Rozelle Psychiatric Hospital.

The family visited him every weekend, so Karen was engaged at an early age with the residents and the mental health service system of the time. The family engendered a positive view of those living with mental illness, akin to any person who may experience challenges and who is deserving of appropriate care and respect. There were times when there was sadness, frustration and grief regarding the availability of humane treatment and support for people living with mental illness. Karen wanted to understand more, so she studied nursing and gained qualifications in psychology. She hoped to bring about changes that would allow people to live with support within the community, rather than being restricted to a life lived within the walls of a psychiatric facility.

Karen is a clinician with a big picture view. She particularly holds an interest in models of care, systems and policy. Her motivation in mental health has not changed since she was a young adult. Her achievements are

around integrated and coordinated care models, bringing organisations together to collaborate with consumers and carers to work as partners towards common treatment and support goals. Karen has been able to influence state governments and national agencies in developing models of care that have an impact on recovery and wellbeing of consumers and their families and friends. For example, in 2007, Karen pioneered the co-location of headspace and public mental health services to provide a continuum of care for young people and their families and reduce issues when transferring care between agencies. Karen says she has learnt many lessons in this work, and has enjoyed partnering with many extraordinary consumers, carers and mental health professionals.

While Karen focused on leadership of non-government organisations, she was keen to contribute to systemic reform across the entirety of the mental health system. To this end, she chaired the NSW Mental

Health Coordinating Council from 2010 to 2017, with a focus on increasing quality and professional standards through learning and organisational development strategies for NGOs and was an inaugural member of Community Mental Health Australia advocating for the inclusion and integration of NGOs into significant national mental health reform processes such as the NDIS. She was the inaugural chair in 2013 of the Community Council and later Deputy Commissioner at the Mental Health Commission of NSW. This afforded Karen the opportunity to collaborate with a wide range of subject matter experts and key stakeholders to engage in projects that can improve consumer and carer experiences and increase individual and community impact.



**Toni  
Garretty**

**Educator,  
advocate,  
carer**

Toni was born at Bulli on the NSW south coast.  
She is one of four children.

Her parents experienced the devastation of World War II. Her father was deployed as a soldier overseas, leaving her mother to parent Toni's eldest sister and run the family business alone. Like many other returning soldiers, Toni's father would not talk about his experience, as the memories were too traumatic. Toni's mother regularly stockpiled food staples long after experiencing the hardships of the Great Depression. Toni confesses to teasing her mother for her habit, however she now realises she must have inherited this trait because there was no need to panic buy when COVID-19 hit, as her pantry was fully stocked.

Toni is a wife (married 44 years), mother to four children and grandmother to four. When one of her children was diagnosed with a mental illness in 2000, Toni became interested in mental health and support services available to people with a lived experience and their families. Toni says she personally found navigating the mental health system difficult and communication with professionals was often sparse. As a parent and nurse, Toni wanted to improve service delivery and understanding for other families

and carers who supported loved ones with mental health issues. Toni changed direction in her nursing career and commenced working with a community-based organisation as a carer advocate in 2001.

In 2004, she started work as Clinical Coordinator/Team Leader in the Mental Health Family and Carer Team, based in the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District. Toni's professional dedication and strong advocacy for improvements in mental health services to people with a lived experience, families, carers and professionals was acknowledged at state level in 2019, when she was appointed as one of the part-time Deputy Commissioners at the Mental Health Commission of NSW. She uses her role at the Commission to consult with community, to advocate for mental health reforms and, drawing on her personal experience as a carer, her clinical experience and formal qualifications, to contribute to improving mental health and wellbeing for people in NSW.

In her role with the mental health service, Toni leads a small team including an experienced psychiatrist and skilled mental health family

systems trained clinicians, who provide interventions to families and carers experiencing complex needs and guide the development and delivery of initiatives to enhance clinicians' skills and confidence when connecting with carers. All clinicians are encouraged and supported to offer a comprehensive range of options, including assistance with navigating the system, carer rights, support, advocacy, illness specific information and education on medications. This approach creates optimal engagement to improve the family and carer experience.

Toni is a qualified educator and highly experienced mental health care trainer. She develops and delivers a range of training initiatives for families, professionals, organisations and community members across NSW. She is passionate about improving mental health literacy and reducing existing stigma. Throughout Toni's extensive history of supporting families and carers, she recognises the significance and value in working collaboratively, and supports clinicians to strengthen their skills and confidence in family inclusive practice, to create optimum outcomes for all.



## Jackie Curtis (1964)

**Psychiatrist, early psychosis innovator, advocate for cardiometabolic health**

Jackie grew up in Sydney, the eldest child of Hungarian holocaust survivors. Since high school, Jackie had always wanted to be a psychiatrist, a wish she attributed to a book and subsequent movie in which the psychiatrist helped a severely traumatised girl to recover.

Jackie realised she may also have been influenced by her aunt, who lived with schizophrenia and died prematurely in her 60s.

In 2000, Jackie began to work in the Bondi Early Psychosis Program (EPP), which was relatively new at that time. This small team offered comprehensive multidisciplinary support to young people on their recovery journey. Jackie became interested in the obvious weight gain in the young people once they commenced medication treatment. The team began to set up programs and developed clinical guidelines to protect the physical health of people living with psychosis.

Jackie's key achievements have included:

- developing the Positive Cardiometabolic Health Algorithm (2011, NSW HETI) which has been adapted and adopted in seven countries: "Don't Just Screen, Intervene"
- being co-chair and co-founder (with UK colleague Dr David Shiers) of iphYs: international physical health in youth stream (since 2011), an international collaboration which focused on the prevention and early intervention of cardiometabolic sequel of psychosis and its treatment in young people
- developing the clinical program Keeping the Body in Mind (2013), the first integrated lifestyle intervention service embedded into first episode psychosis services, a model which has been replicated elsewhere
- co-developing the Health Active Lives (HeAL) declaration, an international consensus statement on improving the physical health of young people with psychosis (2013 and launched internationally in 2014)
- being part of the World Health Organization Guideline Development Group for prevention and treatment of physical health conditions in people with severe mental disorders (2018).

Jackie has been influenced by people living with serious mental illness who challenged her core beliefs, including Janet Meagher AM and Stephanie Ewart, and says their perspectives have remained influential in her work. Jackie's collaboration with Dr David Shiers since 2010 has been pivotal, and together they have embarked on collective activism and advocacy arguing against the prevailing health inequities faced by so many people living with psychotic conditions. Jackie is also proud of having encouraged the development of a new generation of lifestyle clinicians who are now embedded in mental health services, education and training.

Jackie is currently Executive Director of the Mindgardens Neuroscience Network. Jackie has always seen herself primarily as a clinician and has worked predominantly in community based public mental health services with people who live with severe mental health challenges, especially psychosis.



# 2001–2005

Eileen McDonald  
Randa Kattan  
Cathy Kezelman AM

Partnerships  
in action

| 2001                                                                                                        | 2002                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 2003                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 2004 | 2005                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>John Howard elected as PM for a third term.</p> <p>Marie Bashir AD CVO appointed as Governor of NSW.</p> | <p>NSW experiences 100-year drought.</p> <p>‘Framework for Rehabilitation for Mental Health’ released by NSW Government.</p> <p>NSW Framework for Housing and Accommodation Support.</p> <p>National Mental Health Consumer Carer Forum (NMHCCF) established.</p> | <p>‘Out of Hospital, Out of Mind’ Report.</p> <p>Third National Mental Health Plan.</p> <p>Australian troops in Iraq.</p> <p>Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) Phase 1 rolled out across NSW.</p> |      | <p>‘Not for Service: Experiences of Injustice and Despair in Mental Health Care in Australia’ Report is released.</p> <p>Select Committee on Mental Health is established.</p> |



## Eileen McDonald

Disability and family advocate, lived experience peer researcher and leader

Eileen was raised in a bicultural family in the US, and now lives in a regional town in NSW. Her life experiences have, at times, left her traumatised and overwhelmed.

As life has many twists and turns, so Eileen's life took her through several experiences and connections that have made her the significant advocate she has become today. Based on her life journey, learning and personal efforts she has become an effective representative and is active in mental health reform as a lived experience consultant. Although successful in those roles she has developed and is widely respected for her leadership roles in advocacy, policy reform, research and the peer workforce.

Having experienced the trauma and abuses of mental health systems, she is passionately motivated to use her expertise to drive positive changes in mental health policy and service delivery. Eileen's achievements have

included developing training and mentoring for peer support group facilitators in the community post deinstitutionalisation. Eileen also developed systemic advocacy and public speaking training with a definitive human rights focus, to effectively equip and empower others to use their experiences and skills.

She is proud to demonstrate hope and recovery on a daily basis, as she contributes to increasing lived experience engagement and leadership and encouraging her peers in all aspects of mental health and health reform and research. Eileen is acknowledged in the sector as a family and peer representative and, in her own words, is a "tenacious advocate".

Having experienced the trauma and abuses of mental health systems, she is passionately motivated to use her expertise to drive positive changes ...



Randa  
Kattan

Community leader,  
advocate

Randa is a national social sector executive with over 30 years of on the ground experience in key community leadership roles.

Randa is the Chief Executive of Arab Council Australia, an organisation that has been serving the community for 43 years. Currently residing in Sydney, Randa was born in Beirut Lebanon, migrating to Australia in the 1970s as a teenager.

Randa has been at the forefront of critical community engagement and dialogue and has pioneered groundbreaking cultural and community building projects within and outside the Arab community. She has worked in the areas of settlement, employment, youth, women and management, and has been a public commentator and advocate on issues including divisive political discourse, status of women, equality, equity and inclusion.

Since the early 2000s, she has led initiatives that strive to destigmatise mental health issues and promote inclusivity of people with mental health concerns. A recent example was the AwarAbility Project, funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency, that adopted a strengths-based

approach to increase the knowledge and skills of the Arabic speaking communities living in south western and western Sydney to become more inclusive of people with disability and mental health concerns. As well as community sessions, the project produced six short videos, each in Arabic and English, as part of a web series that combined music clips, drama and the sharing of personal stories.

Randa continues to strongly advocate for increased resources for multicultural mental health services, an area that she believes continues to be grossly overlooked. At the forefront of critical community engagement and dialogue, Randa has served on numerous committees including the Premier's Council for Women, the NSW Anti-Poverty Week Facilitating Group, and as a Jury Member of the Sydney Peace Prize. Randa was the Founding Chair of the Sydney Alliance and in 2014 was named in the Pro Bono Australia's first Impact 25 List as one of 25 most influential people in Australia's not-for-profit sector.

Randa says "There is a lot to be proud of, but the achievements that left a lasting impression on me are definitely those where we pushed against the tide, like when we stood up for marriage equality. We knew it wasn't popular in the community but combating inequality and injustice in all its forms is a core value, and equality for some is not equality at all. I know I have a reputation for calling it as it is and not letting go. Injustice in all its forms drives me to speak out without fear or favour. I am passionate because I care about righting injustice. I come on too strong because I feel strongly. I push hard because things aren't moving fast enough."



## Cathy Kezelman AM

Advocate for trauma awareness and trauma-informed care

Cathy was born in Brisbane. Her childhood, ostensibly carefree, subjected her to emotional and sexual abuse over many years.

When she was 14 her family moved to Sydney following the suicide of her father.

Cathy studied medicine and practised for 20 years as a GP. In her mid-40s the sudden death of her niece triggered frequent flashbacks. A respected GP, married with four children, Cathy became bedbound — profoundly depressed, dissociative and acutely suicidal. Her medical training was of no use, and her medical colleagues provided little to no support.

Cathy's personal experiences propelled her into her current work. In 2002 Cathy found comfort in a small NGO, Adult Survivors of Child Abuse (ASCA), which worked with survivors of child sexual abuse. Perhaps she was not "crazy" after all. She joined the board of ASCA and has held leading positions within the organisation, now Blue Knot Foundation, over 20 years.

Cathy is now President (CEO) and Executive Director of Blue Knot Foundation which empowers adult

survivors of all forms of complex trauma to recover. She has driven the strategic growth and direction of the organisation, now a nationally and internationally recognised thought, policy, practice and training leader in trauma-informed practice and best practice responses to the more than 5 million Australian adults living with the impacts of complex trauma. Cathy was a director of the Mental Health Coordinating Council (NSW) from 2009 to 2014 and member of the Community Advisory Council of the Mental Health Commission of NSW from 2013 to 2019. In 2015 she was honoured as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for significant service to community health as a supporter and advocate for survivors of child abuse.

Cathy has advocated publicly in the media, at conferences and in forums for socio-political change to build currency around survivor expertise and understanding of the burden of mental distress which so many trauma survivors experience, and to emphasise its physiological basis. She has co-authored and disseminated

multiple internationally acclaimed evidence-informed resources and guidelines, informing training and provision of services to survivors, personal supporters, workers, professionals and leaders across diverse sectors. She has also authored a range of submissions to Senate and government inquiries and advocated for inclusion of complex trauma within mental health agenda and introduction of trauma-informed care and practice approach across services systems.

As a medical practitioner, Cathy is all too aware of the medical model and its diagnostic focus. She continues to advocate for what is missing — an additional focus on the psychosocial origins of mental distress. This additional lens values lived experience expertise and the importance of building safety and fostering trust. Most importantly, it puts the humanity back into the service system which Cathy believes enables us all to hold onto hope and embrace possibilities for healing.



# 2006–2010

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Allison (Allie) Kokany  
Jenna Roberts

Integration  
of initiatives

| 2006                                                                                                                                                                    | 2007                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 2008                            | 2009                                                                                                                                 | 2010                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>'National Action Plan for Mental Health' released by Council of Australian Governments (COAG).</p> <p>The 'Better Access Program' for mental health is launched.</p> | <p>NSW Community Mental Health Strategy announced.</p> <p>Community Mental Health Australia founded.</p> <p>UN Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) endorsed by Australia.</p> <p>Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) Phase 2 rolled out across NSW.</p> | <p>Rozelle Hospital closes.</p> | <p>Fourth National Mental Health Plan.</p> <p>Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) Phase 3 rolled out across NSW.</p> | <p><i>NSW Carers (Recognition) Act 2010.</i></p> <p>Professor Patrick McGorry is Australian of the Year.</p> <p>Senate Community Affairs References Committee releases 'The hidden toll: Suicide in Australia'.</p> <p>Development and approval of curriculum, Certificate IV Mental Health Peer Work (2010–15).</p> |



**Allison (Allie)  
Kokany  
(1958–2018)**  
**Activist, advocate**

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Allie was a long-time consumer advocate and worker who spent decades working to achieve a better, fairer and kinder world for people who live with mental health issues.

She began her career as a consumer advocate in Newcastle and went on to hold many positions, including chair of the NSW Consumer Advisory Group (NSW CAG, now known as BEING) for 6 years, the NSW consumer representative on the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum, a dedicated Official Visitor, and a consumer consultant at WentWest Primary Health Network.

In her capacity as chair of the NSW Consumer Advisory Group at the time of the Mental Health Commission of NSW's establishment (2012), she was among a small leadership

group who laid the groundwork for the Commission's Lived Experience Framework project, which is ongoing. She became a passionate defender of the rights of people in the forensic mental health system, evidence of her guiding belief in the need to improve the lives of our community's most stigmatised and vulnerable.

Allie advocated and supported the rights of those with mental health issues and those in long-term care, often challenging care conventions. She was actively involved with initiatives on a local, state and national level and assisted the

Primary Health Network in its commissioning processes to design consumer needs centred services.

In addition to her substantive achievements, many will remember Allie for her friendliness, her generosity with her time, and her down to earth nature. After her death the Allison Kokany Scholarship was created to perpetuate her contribution to the mental health sector. It was launched in 2018 and honours the tireless work that Allison championed during her time at WentWest Primary Health Network.

Allie advocated and supported the rights of those with mental health issues and those in long-term care, often challenging care conventions.



**Jenna  
Roberts  
(1987)**

**Advocate,  
change agent**

Born in Cairns and raised in north Queensland, Jenna says “My great grandmother grew up on Palm Island near Townsville as part of the Stolen Generations, raised to deny her heritage.

I am also a gay woman raised in regional Queensland and I recognise the importance of addressing the needs of the LGBTI+ community, including stigma and discrimination, and advocating for interventions which aim to reduce preventable mental health disparities which many of us continue to experience. I am committed to supporting individual recovery, connection with community and empowering others to lead positive lives, embracing who they are”.

The life-defining event in Jenna’s story was her recovery from drug addiction in her mid-twenties. A successful student at a top Brisbane school and then a law student at Queensland University of Technology. Jenna developed an addiction that began with the misuse of prescribed pain medication and progressed to using other drugs. “That period of my life was the darkest but I know now that the love of family and friends, strong support systems, and a good dose of grit and determination can change your life.

Jenna is an advocate and a change agent. She has worked in a variety of mental health settings across regional NSW and the ACT and knows first-hand how different communities can be in terms of the support they offer. She is passionate about working with communities to promote person-centred initiatives which focus on wellbeing. “I understand the importance of both quality and accessibility to appropriate mental health services and support. Timely treatment that aligns with national best practice should be standard no matter where you live.”

Jenna began her career in mental health at a drug and alcohol recovery centre in 2008, where many people were dealing with complex personal and health issues. Other roles include CEO of Tend Riverina, Suicide Prevention Manager at Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network, working with NSW Health at InforMH, developing and implementing the Your Experience

of Service (YES) measure across all 18 Local Health Districts and Speciality Health Networks in NSW, as well as continuing the development of the consumer participation and peer support program at St Vincent’s Hospital Sydney.

Jenna has a strong interest in policy development and systemic change of mental health service delivery. In recognition of her diversity of experience and perspectives, Jenna was appointed a part-time Deputy Commissioner of the Mental Health Commission of NSW in 2019. In 2021 Jenna joined Stride Mental Health as Service Manager to establish a pilot Step Up Step Down residential facility. Jenna continues to enjoy taking on consulting roles across Australia in the mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and suicide prevention fields.

# 2011–2015

Titia Sprague  
Elizabeth McEntyre  
Violet Roumeliotis AM

## Community speaking out

| 2011                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 2012                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 2013                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 2014                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 2015                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Recovery Oriented Self Assessment (ROSSAT) launched.</p> <p>National MH Consumer Carer Forum releases position paper: 'Unravelling psychosocial disability'.</p> <p>Mental Health Coordinating Council holds public forum: 'Unravelling physical health issues associated with mental illness'.</p> <p>National Mental Health Peer Workforce Forum (NMHPWF) established.</p> | <p>National Mental Health Commission established.</p> <p>National Mental Health Commission's first 'Contributing Life' report card published.</p> <p>Mental Health Commission of NSW established.</p> <p><i>NSW Boarding Houses Act 2012</i> passed in Parliament.</p> <p>PRA and Richmond Fellowship of NSW formally merge, becoming Richmond PRA.</p> <p>'Roadmap to National Mental Health Reform' launched.</p> <p>Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) evaluated.</p> | <p>National Framework for Recovery Oriented Services.</p> <p>National Mental Health Commission's second 'Contributing Life' report card is published.</p> <p>'Trauma-Informed Care and Practice: Towards a cultural shift in policy reform across mental health and human services in Australia.' released by MHCC.</p> <p>National Disability Insurance Scheme launched.</p> | <p>'Living Well: Putting people at the centre of mental health reform in NSW' released by NSW Mental Health Commission.</p> <p><i>Mental Health Act 2007</i> reviewed and the <i>Mental Health Amendment (Statutory Review) Act 2014</i> passed in Parliament.</p> <p>National Mental Health Commission report to Government released: 'Review of Mental Health Services and Programs'.</p> <p>Marie Bashir AD CVO retires as Governor of NSW.</p> | <p>Mental Health Association of NSW renamed 'Way Ahead'.</p> <p>NSW Mental Health Commission holds Mental Health Peer Workforce Forum.</p> |



**Titia  
Sprague  
(1960)**  
Clinician,  
change maker

A longstanding friend of Titia likes to recall that “she was a sickly child”. Although this description annoys Titia, it is supported by data.

In the days when treatments were not so effective, Titia missed a lot of time from school due to her asthma, allergies and infections.

Being a “sickly child” may well have influenced Titia’s plan to study medicine and become a paediatrician. However, when she reached her paediatric term as a fourth year medical student, she struggled to examine and perform investigations and procedures on little patients. The saving grace was that she enjoyed conversations with children and families. Child and adolescent psychiatry was a much better career option.

Titia worked across a range of clinical settings as a child and adolescent psychiatrist but she was repeatedly drawn to work at the state level, which she felt was a better fit. Postgraduate study in public health strengthened her skills and interest in this field. She also learned much about women in leadership and mental health reform from Professors Marie Bashir

AD and Beverley Raphael AM, two of her bosses in the 1990s and 2000s. Beverley encouraged Titia to complete postgraduate management training to build mental health sector capacity in this area.

Titia is most proud of her role in supporting mental health safety and quality in NSW in the later years of her career from 2011, especially the prevention of seclusion and restraint. Initially this was focused on child and adolescent mental health inpatient units. Titia and colleagues were supported by international experts who provided training and other guidance in evidence-based practice in this area. She had not fully grasped the power and importance of meaningful involvement with consumers, carers and family members in reform until she experienced the profound impact of personal stories that young people and families generously shared with staff during training and quality improvement.

Titia says she’s often been lucky to be in the right place at the right time. She has also found it helpful to use research and cultivate networks. When the review of seclusion, restraint and observation of consumers with a mental illness in NSW Health facilities was conducted by Chief Psychiatrist Dr Murray Wright in 2017, Titia was proud to be a member of the support team. For example, Titia drew on research and networks to respond to staff concerns that staff and consumer safety would be compromised if seclusion and/or restraint were reduced. She confirmed that this concern was not supported by the weight of evidence.

The report’s introduction acknowledged that the review had “at times, been a difficult and demanding process”. As a member of the team that subsequently developed and began monitoring the review’s implementation plan, Titia felt that the groundwork was prepared for the next stage in leadership and culture reform.



Elizabeth  
McEntyre  
(1961)

‘Still here’, sovereign  
Aboriginal woman,  
mental health  
social worker

Elizabeth is a Worimi and Wonnarua woman who descends from the Jonas Family and belongs to Land and Sea Country spanning Port Stephens, the Great Myall Lakes, the Barrington Tops, and the Hunter Valley in NSW.

Along with her family, she has lived on and grown old with Ancestral Lands and Waters — salt and fresh — which has given this sovereign First Nations Woman a firm cultural self and related responsibilities.

A Doctor of Social Work and Criminology, and a mental health social worker in disability and criminal justice, Elizabeth has intentionally worked in demanding roles where she used her unique knowledge, understanding and experience to transform colonial systems which were typically racist and could criminalise, manage and control. She has dedicated most of her career to Aboriginal peoples, families and communities involved with Australian criminal justice systems. Like most Aboriginal families, members of her own family had been in contact with police, courts and prison, and were also unjustly imprisoned for being mentally unwell. Elizabeth says “the women and men in my family involved in criminal justice systems are not and have never been high risk offenders; they were and are however mentally and emotionally unwell and cognitively impaired”. It was these, and the many life accounts of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system, that guided Elizabeth into Aboriginal-led research.

Although her research achievements are many, she is gratified most from two distinctive studies. In 2011 she partnered with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in NSW and the Northern Territory to gain informed insight into the growing numbers of Aboriginal women and men with mental and cognitive disabilities in the criminal justice system. In 2020 the Mental Health Commission of NSW supported Elizabeth to collaborate with First Nations peoples involved in the NSW forensic mental health system, and living at the Forensic Hospital, to document their grounded lived experience so that we could all know what needed to happen for us to do better.

Elizabeth has persistently devoted her life and time to having the most impact. Her extensive work with both the government and Aboriginal community-led sectors is notable. She has been the Aboriginal Official Visitor of prisons statewide with the NSW Inspector of Custodial Services, and a member of the NSW Mental Health Review Tribunal conducting civil and forensic hearings. She has served on boards including Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council

(covering Maitland and Lower Hunter Valley), Indigenous Allied Health Australia, the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network, Hunter Local Land Services (covering Lower and Upper Hunter Valleys, Mid North Coast, Lake Macquarie, Newcastle areas), and GP Synergy (NSW and ACT). She is also an appointed member of the NSW Aboriginal Fishing Trust Expenditure Committee and Port Stephens — Great Lakes Marine Park Advisory Committee.

Elizabeth has been an advisor to several professional associations, service providers, universities and consultative groups including the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, Greening Australia, Seniors Rights Service, Griffith University, University of Sydney and the University of NSW. She has been proudly associated with the Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership between the University of NSW and Walgett Dharriwaa Elders Group to develop and implement innovative community-led solutions to address a range of complex challenges faced by the Walgett community in remote NSW.



## Violet Roumeliotis AM (1959)

Social entrepreneur,  
advocate for  
diverse communities,  
innovator

Violet is a social entrepreneur who champions the strengths of our diverse communities. Through her executive and board roles, Violet has used innovation and collective impact to promote social justice and inclusion.

She is the CEO of Settlement Services International (SSI), a community organisation and social business that supports newcomers and other vulnerable individuals to achieve their full potential. During Violet's eight years as CEO, Settlement Services International has grown from a Sydney-based organisation with 68 staff to a 900-plus workforce that supports more than 37,500 people nationally each year.

Violet's story mirrors many other difficult but uplifting migrant journeys. Her parents arrived in Australia from post-war Greece in 1955 and turned to the salvation of many Greeks at that time — the corner shop! Education was highly valued in her family. Violet and her sisters were encouraged to read widely, play the piano, and learn to speak and write Greek fluently. "It was expected that we would all finish school and go to university, and we did!"

Growing up, Violet saw many injustices and indignities thrust on her parents, extended family and community members. "I witnessed racism and prejudice, small-mindedness and

cruelty." This drove Violet's deep commitment to social justice and the lifelong belief that every person has the right to meet their full potential and to live the life they chose, including those battling mental health issues.

Violet is committed to achieving equity and advancing diversity and inclusion in all forms. In 2020, she was honoured as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for outstanding service to the community. Violet is also a former Telstra Australia Businesswoman of the Year, has been named one of the *Australian Financial Review's* Top 100 Women of Influence for 2018 in the category of Diversity and Inclusion and was awarded the title of Community Fellow from Western Sydney University for outstanding service to the community.

In recent years, Violet and SSI have focused more attention on alleviating the mental health impacts experienced by refugees, asylum seekers and other newcomers, through several programs. SSI's 'Community Kitchen' program brings together people from all backgrounds fortnightly to support

one another, experiencing workshops, performances, activities and incredible food. SSI also initiated the Ignite program to support the creation of small business start-ups by people from vulnerable communities.

In addition, SSI created its own clinical practice unit to provide training to its staff on recognising trauma and mental health issues and supports the Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Services (STTARS) organisation. Through these initiatives, Violet and SSI have been able to help alleviate mental health impacts, including stress and trauma, that many refugees and asylum seekers have experienced. Violet has also advocated for mental health programs through her various former board roles, including the South Western Sydney Area Health Board.



# 2016–2020

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The common threads in the stories of these women are a passionate drive to contribute to change, personal lived experience or a deep understanding of lived experience, the support of mentors, and sometimes good timing or good luck.

It is now our responsibility to mentor, train, support and lift the women leaders and reformers of tomorrow.

Preparing  
for the  
next wave

| 2016                                           | 2017                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 2018                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 2019                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 2020                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RichmondPRA Ltd. renamed 'Flourish Australia'. | <p>Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan endorsed.</p> <p>Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW renamed 'One Door'.</p> <p>Release of Mentally Healthy Workplaces Strategy by NSW Government.</p> | <p>Mental Health Commission of NSW launches the 'Lived Experience Framework'.</p> <p>Mental Health Commission of NSW releases 'Strategic Framework for Suicide Prevention 2018–2023'.</p> <p>'Peer work in Australia: A new future for mental health' published jointly by Flourish Australia and Mind Australia.</p> | <p>Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disabilities established.</p> <p>'Our Own Words: Reflections on living with mental distress and extreme states (and living without them)' published.</p> <p>Mental Health Commission of NSW undertakes Mid-Term Review of Living Well 2014–2024 as part of Ministerial Charter with extensive consultation across NSW communities and with stakeholder groups.</p> | <p>Productivity Commission Report on Mental Health in Australia published.</p> <p>Mental Health Commission of NSW publishes 'Living Well in Focus 2020–2024 A strategic plan for community recovery, wellbeing and mental health in NSW'.</p> |

# Conclusion

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## 50 years of change

The Mental Health Commission of NSW collated these biographies to honour the contributions of women who innovated, reformed, lobbied and implemented change across the mental health sector in its broadest sense over the past 50 years. From the 1970s they have, individually and with colleagues, worked tirelessly for change. They have worked as passionate advocates, consumers, bureaucrats attempting to push for change from within the systems, staff in government, health or non-government organisations, in support roles or as volunteers. The contributions of so many women, each in differing circumstances, represent the human drivers of the major mental health and social transformations of those times.

Since 1970 there has been a total turnaround in how services are offered and how people understand mental health issues. Incrementally, community and professional education, rights, rehabilitation, recovery and appropriate supports and community-based services, along with the development of evidence-based interventions and targeted atypical anti-psychotic medications, became tools for reform. Over 50 years, these changes improved mental health care, treatments and outcomes for many, though not yet for all.

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## The authorising environment

Several of the reforming women have commented on the fragility of reform and the impact of the “authorising” or “auspicing” environment around mental health reform. While there are some positive signs of a bipartisan approach to mental health and a more consistent level of commitment, we also note how these women reformers have seized opportunities to drive reform in unlikely places.

The release of *Living Well in Focus 20–24* A strategic plan for community recovery, wellbeing and mental health in NSW in 2020 provides a strong foundation for the next wave of reform and an authorising and auspicing environment for our current and next generation of reformers.

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## From volunteering to peer work

One of the features of mental health today is the prevalence and acceptance of peer work. Peer work has its origin in self-help and mutual support movements that were originally volunteer in nature. People came together to help one another or to advocate for better services. Peer work has evolved into more formalised approaches, and people are now employed in professional roles as peer workers. Peer work is one path to using the learnings from a life lived with a mental health issue that recovery is possible, and a contributing life is a genuine possibility.

People with mental health issues and service providers now expect peer work to be a part of the mix of support offerings that are available. From 2010 to the present, mental health commissions (national and state) have shone a new spotlight onto the peer workforce and its potential, particularly its role in improving the contributing lives of those who can benefit from peer work activity. What is needed now is a greater commitment by providers to expand their peer workforce and establish career structures to enable staff in specialist peer roles to continually improve and develop their careers. The peer workforce is now the most rapidly growing workforce in the mental health sector in Australia, with many working in the non-government sector.

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## Where to from here? — innovation and reform into the future

This book illustrates a broad range of women who have contributed as volunteers, activists, advocates, clinicians, academics and bureaucrats. A number of these women have died, and many others are either retired or nearing retirement. While we are a world away from the experiences of the 1970s, we still need dedicated and informed people protecting the rights and needs of people with mental health issues. Moving into the sixth decade of mental health reform, there will be new generations of activists, reformers and advocates.

The sector must consider what are we actively doing to attract, train and engage young people and new advocates to organisational work, to orient them to the issues of concern, to facilitate their learning, and to begin and sustain a voice in the sector. In the past, the way to activism and advocacy was through serving the community by volunteering and engagement in organisations and governance of programs. These activities gave people a good grounding in processes and participation.

The upcoming and newer activists, reformers and leaders are not all yet fully visible in the broader mental health sector. We must ensure that the upcoming generation is mentored, encouraged, educated and developed. The mental health sector of the future is one of much greater sophistication, more focused on recovery potential, respect for human rights, and more supportive of aspirations for a contributing life than the sector has ever been. We entrust a better future for the mental health sector to the new generation of leaders.

Women reformers in mental health have worked to end the discriminatory responses towards those with mental health issues and to develop community-based solutions based on principles of social justice. They speak clearly that progress could only happen based on equal partnerships with all concerned. Reformers value advocacy so much as it means always working with people, creating small local opportunities for individuals to prove that things are possible and change people's minds and experiences subtly but inexorably.

## We thank them and encourage you, the next generation

We, at the Mental Health Commission of NSW,  
hope that this anthology of activist women in mental  
health reform in NSW has offered encouragement and  
that the work of our leaders gives hope and strength.  
We thank each of these women for their hard, dogged,  
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