

For the attention of the Hon. Brendan O'Connor MP, Minister for Employment Participation

## Review of employment services system

Submission by SANE Australia 25 February 2008

Despite record low levels of unemployment in Australia in recent years, the number of people with a mental illness or psychiatric disability who are out of work remains stubbornly high (over 70% for people with schizophrenia, for example). This not only deprives them of the right to contribute to society, and the benefits and dignity this brings, but also deprives Australia of much-needed employees to fill vacant positions.

Instead of the punitive measures of the past, which have proven unsuccessful anyway, SANE Australia urges the Rudd Labor Government to implement a strategy which actually supports people with a psychiatric disability or mental illness to gain and retain sustainable employment.

Measures to implement this will include the following, as well those listed in the Mental Health Council of Australia's recent *Reforming Welfare to Work* submission and employment-related policies recommended by ACOSS, to which SANE Australia has also contributed:

- Incentives to employment agencies (especially those in the specialist DEN network) to provide ongoing support for sustainable employment (not short-term placements)
- Incentives for people on the Disability Pension to 'test the water' in employment without fear of losing entitlements
- Support for education and training of employers to encourage employment of people affected by mental illness, together with financial incentives to do so
- Support for implementation of innovative employment solutions for this group, such as Social Firms
- Improved coordination of rehabilitation/ recovery programs and employment programs.

We look forward to the recommendations of this review and their implementation, and would be pleased to provide further information or consultation regarding any specific questions raised by this submission.