MENTAL HEALTH FACT SHEET
Mental Health and Employment

- Employment is critical for people with mental illness. People with a mental illness are among the most socially and economically marginalised members of the community, experiencing high levels of unemployment and nonparticipation in the work force.

- Unemployment leads to a loss of purpose, structure, status and a sense of identity which employment brings. Employment enables social inclusion and meaningful participation in the wider community.[1]

- Having a mental illness drastically reduces a person's ability to obtain and maintain employment, forcing them to seek financial assistance such as the youth allowance or disability support pension. Both the public and private sector have failed in terms of hiring and maintaining employment for people with mental illness.

- A 2006 report for the Victorian Government estimated that mental illness led to about 4.7 million absentee days a year, of which 80% was due to mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety. This equated to about a $660 million yearly loss to the Victorian economy.[2] This roughly equates to over 18 million absentee days Australia-wide.

- Depression alone accounts for six million full work days lost per year.[3]

- Three-quarters of people with depression who receive effective treatment are in employment six months later, compared with half of those who do not receive treatment.[4]

- The performance of the Australian Public Service (APS) in employing people with a disability is poor. Over the past decade, the number of people with a disability employed by the APS declined by one-third — from 5.8% to 3.8%.[5]

- Workforce non-participation and unemployment levels for people with psychotic disorders are 75-90% in the USA, 61-73% in the UK and 75-78% in Australia. In an Australian survey of 134 disability employment service providers assisting 3025 jobseekers, psychiatric or psychological disabilities represented the largest category at 30 percent, and fared worse than any other disability category in both securing and retaining employment.[6]

- In Australia in 1998, the employed proportion of people with severe mental illness ranged from 16.3% for people with schizophrenia, to 21.1% for people with mixed psychotic disorders. In contrast, the rate of employment in healthy working age Australians was 73.8%.[7]

- Preliminary research shows that Australian businesses lose over $6.5 billion a year by failure to provide early intervention/treatment for employees with mental illness.[8]

- The average cost to employers is more than $9,000 per annum for every worker not seeking treatment for depression or anxiety.[9]

The MHCA is the independent, national representative body of the mental health sector in Australia.
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[1] Geoff Waghorn and Chris Lloyd, The Employment of People with Mental Illness, 2005
[2] Boston Consulting Group, *Improving Mental Health Outcomes in Victoria: The Next Wave of Reform*, 2006
[3] Hickie, I., et al, *Investing in Australia's Future*, Mental Health Council of Australia, Canberra, 2004.
[4] *Investing in Australia's Future*, Mental Health Council of Australia, Canberra, 2004.
[5] Australian Government Management Advisory Committee, *Employment of People in the APS*, 2006
[6] Geoff Waghorn and Chris Lloyd, *The Employment of People with Mental Illness*, 2005
[7] Robert King, Geoff Waghorn et al, *Enhancing Employment Services for People with Severe Mental Illness*, 2006
[8] Work Outcomes Research Cost-Benefit Project, preliminary data, MHCA media release 01/05/2007
[9] Work Outcomes Research Cost-Benefit Project, preliminary data, MHCA media release 01/05/2007