

HEAD OF HEALTH, WESTERN CAPE PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA, VISITS KMMH

Contributed by Administrator
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Prof. Craig Househam, Head of Health in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, visited House Miles Bowker at Stikland Hospital on a fact finding mission today. This visit came as a result of Roy Harris, CEO of Kingdom Ministries Mental Health & Psychiatry (KMMH), who recently made an urgent appeal before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health & Social Development to increase subsidies for level 3 service users.

The total health budget 2007/08 rises 9,6% to R7,095 billion and is set to continue to rise 9% on average on a yearly basis to reach R8,4 billion in 2009/2010. If history repeats itself, the mental health sector will not see any part of the year to year increased budget.

The increased demand on health services, fuelled by the influx of people from other provinces, places enormous pressure on the Department of Health (DoH) to provide quality services. Mental Health Not-for-Profit Organisations (NPO's) providing services to users who were traditionally the responsibility of the DoH, are in dire straits due to the fact that they were basically overlooked, even ignored in terms of the DoH budget over the last 6 years.

European Union (EU) contributions came to the rescue of some NPO's in 2005 as they only received 1 increase in subsidies in 6 years. In 2006, 2 year EU contracts were signed with the DoH, which were not honoured in its second year. The only verbal explanation that was given at the request of NPO's was that a percentage of the EU budget had to be re allocated to another province. This move placed many reputable and already cash strapped mental health NPO's in crises, once again faced with closure.

As a consequence thereof, the mental health sector formed a group representing more than 100 mental health NPO's, referred to as the MHNS (Mental Health NPO Stakeholders) and started negotiations with the DoH. The outcome, though positive for some NPO's, failed to replace the EU Funding, leaving the NPO's in a worse off position than 6 years ago.

The visit of Prof. Househam today, was hailed by KMMH as a step in the right direction, as the partnership between the DoH and Mental Health NPO's deteriorated over the last few years.

According to Roy Harris, one of the founder members of the MHNS, it is imperative to establish Provincial MHNS groups in all provinces to ensure a united front when negotiating with various Government Departments on mental health issues. "The mental health sector will also have to start structuring and positioning itself to create an awareness of the needs of mental health care users and effectively advocate for the rights of all users. It is time we move away from the general accepted and self fulfilled prophecy that mental health is the stepchild of the health system."