18 April 2018

MEDIA STATEMENT
ACMHN calls for action from all Australian governments on mental health care following excessive force from police officers

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) calls for immediate action to be taken to review the mental health system following the recent incident involving the police force responding to a person with mental illness, which was aired on Channel Nine’s A Current Affair program on 17 April 2018.

The chief executive of ACMHN, Adj Assoc Prof Kim Ryan said that this incident is yet another indicator of the mental health system in crisis. The incident follows the release of Australian Institute of Criminology data earlier this year showing that Australians experiencing mental illness are significantly overrepresented in police shootings.

“The lack of community and primary mental health services means that increasingly, the response for people experiencing a mental health crisis is coming from the police services,” said Ms Ryan.

“People experiencing mental illness who are in distress need mental health care, not handcuffs.”

The incidents point to a failure of existing policy and funding arrangements to ensure appropriate and adequate mental health services in the community and primary care settings, particularly for those experiencing more moderate to severe mental illness.

Ms Ryan said that the police force has a role to play, but should not be filling the gap created when people have been unable to access the specialist mental health services they need.

The ACMHN has been receiving feedback from its members about waiting lists for community mental health services which are so long that services have been forced to stop adding people to the list.

The criminal justice system, police services and other service systems should still be part of the solution. However, this does not negate the need for people experiencing mental illness to receive specialist mental health care, just as you would reasonably expect to receive health care for a physical illness.

The ACMHN is the professional peak body for mental health nurses in Australia.

END

Available for interview or comment ACMHN CEO Adjunct Professor Kim Ryan

Media Enquiries:
Sharina Smith
E: communications@acmhn.org
Ph: 6285 1078