

AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF MENTAL HEALTH NURSES: AGM

29 November 2021

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It is with pleasure that I present my President's Report to the 2021 Annual General Meeting of the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN). In many ways 2021 has been a year marked by adversity. I doubt that I need to comment on the nature of that adversity as it has touched all of us, in all aspects of our lives in so many ways. However, adversity often brings opportunity. This has certainly been the case for the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses in the last 12 months.

When the current Board took up its responsibilities in 2020 the ACMHN faced declining membership numbers, a poor financial situation, limited capacity to provide services to members and communication systems that for the most part, were not fit for purpose. A number of our Special Interest Groups were inactive, our professional development activities were on the wane. We had recently deferred the International Conference but were hopeful of it going ahead in 2021. While all of these issues haven't as yet been fully resolved, considerable progress has been made in addressing them. Out of this adversity has come opportunities.

Working with the CEO and the ACMHN office staff the Board set about the task of addressing these many challenges. It became clear very quickly that to move forward it would be necessary to seek the views of members regarding the challenges faced and what ought to be done to address them. A survey was sent out and many of you responded.

Your responses to the survey identified Strengths, Weaknesses. Opportunities and Threats.

Among the **Strengths** you identified:

- The ACMHN as the sole national professional organisation representing mental nurses, with a long history and established legitimacy and reputation
- Established services to members that could be built upon
- Committed and capable office staff

- The International Journal of Mental Health Nursing and the College's regular newsletter

Among the **Weaknesses** you identified:

- Modest membership and evident member disillusionment and disengagement
- Loss of Branches
- Poor financial position
- Poor communication to members

Among the **Opportunities** you identified:

- Situate MHNs as the solution to unmet mental health community need through assertive advocacy and marketing in response to the Victorian Royal Commission report and the Productivity Commission report
- Collaboration and partner with State mental health services, consumer groups and other influential mental health professional groups and unions
- Develop and own professional development, supervision, credentialing processes and resources
- Build strong Branches to act at the local level

Among the **Threats** you identified:

- Low membership and subsequent poor financial position
- Undervaluing of mental health nurses generally and falling specialist identity
- Non-members, especially younger ones, not seeing the purpose of the College
- Internal fragmentation between members

The results of the survey along with early deliberations by the Board and input by other ACMHN stakeholders, constituted a beginning point for developing a new Strategic Plan, which is being launched at this meeting and will be outlined by my colleague on the Board of Directors Donna Hansen. The Board has also been working on developing a new Governance structure and this is also being launched at this AGM. Vicki Green, who is also a member of the Board Directors will provide an outline of this presently.

On average (with formally scheduled and out of session scheduled additional meetings), the Board of Directors has met monthly during the last year. We intend this to continue in 2022. The primary concerns of the Board to date have been to stabilize the financial situation of the College, to support the CEO and College staff in providing ongoing services to members, often under difficult circumstances, to develop and implement a new Strategic Plan and Governance Structure to better support the activities of the ACMHN, to restore and further develop the College's standing and reputation, and to advocate for mental health nursing to be at the forefront of the considerable mental health reforms that are underway nationally and in every State and Territory.

Much remains to be done and in many ways we are still at the beginning of securing the future of our organisation – financially and reputationally. What happens next will depend on all of us – the members of the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses, working together to make a difference.

I would like to thank my fellow Board members for their very considerable efforts on behalf of the College during the last twelve months. A vote of thanks also goes to our very committed and professional office staff, who under the leadership of the CEO Stephen Jackson work tirelessly to maintain and build services to members, often under very difficult circumstances and much reduced staffing levels. Finally, I would like to thank the members of the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses for keeping faith with the organization – your professional College, during difficult times. I hope to see many of you at the two conferences planned for 2022.



Conjoint Professor Mike Hazelton

President

Australian College of Mental Health Nurses