



Department of Health

Secretary

50 Lonsdale Street
GPO Box 4541
Melbourne Victoria 3001
DX 210311
www.health.vic.gov.au
Telephone: 1300 253 942
Facsimile: 1300 253 964

e2085954

Ms Candice Batty
The Registry
State Coroner's Office
57-83 Kavanagh Street.
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Dear Ms Batty

Thank you for your letter of 3 September 2010 to the Chief Psychiatrist in relation to the inquest into the death of Mr X. I note that the Minister for Mental Health has also been provided with a copy of the Coroners "Finding into death with request" for Mr X.

I note that the Coroner has made a recommendation that *"...a working group be established and chaired by the Department of Health, to prepare a report to the Coroner's Court of Victoria within one calendar year. The purpose of this report is to identify any failures to a coordinated and systemic approach to treatment of persons with complex mental and other related health problems, and any areas of system reform to overcome those barriers in Victoria."* While I recognise the importance of the areas included in this recommendation, in my view the need for such a committee at this stage may have been subsumed by other activities undertaken by the Department of Health.

The Coroner may be aware that in May 2009 the Minister for Mental Health released *Because Mental Health Matters, the Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009 to 2019*. The Strategy includes a number of areas for significant reform. These include service components and models of care that I believe would cover the areas of concern raised by the Coroner in this recommendation. In particular, reform is intended to encompass greater continuity of care, to streamline service access and emergency responses, and better meet the needs of adults and older people with moderate to severe mental illness. Areas that will be given consideration include how to best support those who have mental illness and substance misuse, and to better engage people with mental illness who may be in, or exiting, the forensic system.

The Minister has also established a Mental Health Reform Council chaired by Mr Terry Laidler, and a number of Partnerships groups intended to focus on particular areas of action that cross portfolios or government departments. The Council has commenced a very active workplan. In this context, I feel it is more appropriate that the work currently being undertaken continue. I am concerned that a committee such as that suggested by the coroner may well duplicate the work being undertaken by the Council and other bodies already established.

Given the relative newness of the Coroners Act 2008, it may be helpful to meet to discuss some of the issues raised by recommendations of this kind. I would also be willing to provide further information to the Coroner regarding current activities, and to consider how best to inform the Coroner about mental health reform directions on a regular basis. I will also ensure that the concerns raised by the Coroner in this inquest are conveyed to the Reform Council.

Please let me know if the Coroner would like to meet with me and other Department of Health representatives to further discuss this matter.

Yours sincerely



FRAN THORN
Secretary