

Callan Park Consumer Centre Proposal

Rose Cottage (Building 402), Callan Park

Justice Action and Breakout Media Communications | 29 September 2026



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Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Wangal people of the Eora Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which Callan Park stands, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We recognise that the impacts of colonisation are inseparable from the story of mental health in Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience psychiatric disability at disproportionately high rates and are six times more likely to die by suicide than non-Indigenous Australians.¹ Any mental health service established at Callan Park carries a responsibility to be genuinely accessible, culturally safe, and shaped in partnership with Aboriginal communities.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (Cat No 4704.0, 2010).

1. Executive Summary

1.1 At a Glance

This proposal asks that Rose Cottage (Building 402), Callan Park, be secured as a consumer-led mental health centre: held in the public interest, consistent with the long-term vision for the Park, and delivered by and for the people it serves. The Centre would be home to iExpress, a ready-to-run communication service for people in prisons and locked psychiatric wards, alongside a suite of peer-led programs. It would be managed by an experienced social enterprise, with funding available immediately. With the law governing Callan Park about to change and Rose Cottage still vacant, there is a narrow window to secure the building for its intended purpose.

1.2 A Site Set Aside for Mental Health

Callan Park was purchased by the NSW Government in 1873 to care for people with psychiatric disabilities, and remained a mental health site until its last patients were transferred in 2008.² Mental health is not an incidental use of this land; it is the reason the land was set aside. Much of the Park was built and maintained by the unpaid or poorly paid labour of the people held there.³

That history includes serious harm. The 1961 Royal Commission exposed chronic underfunding, overcrowding, neglect and coercive treatment of largely involuntary patients, and became a catalyst for deinstitutionalisation in NSW.⁴ But community care was never properly funded, and too many people ended up unsupported, homeless or in prison. Using this land today for genuinely consumer-led, dignified support is a direct way to answer that history, rather than simply commemorate it. This obligation extends to the Wangal people, the Traditional Custodians of the land, and any centre at Rose Cottage should be shaped in partnership with Aboriginal communities. (*Detail: Sections 2.2 and 2.3*)

1.3 Why Now

The Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Amendment (Review) Bill 2026 passed both Houses of the NSW Parliament on 18 September 2026 and is awaiting assent.⁵ Once in force, it will for the first time name health facilities and services among the objects of the *Callan Park (Special Provisions) Act 2002*, a direct acknowledgment that health belongs at Callan Park. At the same time, it relaxes the requirement that Callan Park buildings go only to not-for-profit tenants.⁶

² New South Wales, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Council, Callan Park Trust Bill 2008, Second Reading <<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/bill/files/2506/LC%202R.pdf>>; Leichhardt Council, *Callan Park Plan of Management: Draft for Public Exhibition* (February 2011) s 6 'Built Form' <<https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/804/cp-pom-section6-builtform.pdf.aspx>>.

³ *Report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry in Respect of Certain Matters relating to Callan Park Mental Hospital* (Report, 1961) 381–2 <<https://researchdata.edu.au/report-royal-commission-mental-hospital/168922>>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ NSW Government, 'A Brighter Future for NSW Parklands' (Media Release, September 2026) <<https://www.nsw.gov.au/ministerial-releases/brighter-future-nsw-parklands>>.

⁶ Explanatory Note, Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Amendment (Review) Bill 2026 (NSW) <[https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/bill/files/18869/XN_Greater%20Sydney%20Parklands%20Trust%20Amendment%20\(Review\)%20Bill.pdf](https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/bill/files/18869/XN_Greater%20Sydney%20Parklands%20Trust%20Amendment%20(Review)%20Bill.pdf)>.

Rose Cottage has stood vacant since the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC) relocated in 2012.⁷ Once the amended Act commences, vacant buildings like this one will face much wider competition, including from commercial tenants. The legal case for mental health at Callan Park has never been stronger, but the opportunity will not stay open indefinitely. (*Detail: Section 2.1*)

1.4 A Long-Standing Community Vision

The 2011 Callan Park Master Plan, developed through extensive community consultation, envisioned the Park as a "Wellness Sanctuary" for mental health consumers. It found "virtually unanimous support" for mental health uses on the site and recommended that at least 30% of on-site jobs go to mental health consumers.⁸ It named Rose Cottage specifically as an incubator for non-government organisation (NGO) mental health services, such as support groups, day centres and social enterprises.⁹ The NSW Government's own *Callan Park: Landscape Structure Plan* (2021) also identifies the building for adaptive reuse.¹⁰

This vision has been championed by Inner West Council and by Friends of Callan Park, which has campaigned for more than 25 years to locate modern mental health services on the site.¹¹ The Centre is designed around the Master Plan's guiding principles, which call for health, community and education uses that strengthen mental health and community wellness. (*Detail: Sections 2.3, 2.4 and 4.3*)

1.5 Grounded in Mental Health Reform

State and national policy now centres on recovery: self-determination, hope, meaningful relationships, and a growing peer workforce of people with lived experience. NSW's ten-year strategy, *Living Well*, requires consumer participation at all levels.¹² Yet a significant gap remains between policy and practice. Community-based programs lag behind need, and many people are discharged without any rehabilitation plan.¹³

This proposal responds to that gap. It is built on the consumer movement's principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us": consumers as staff, mentors and decision-makers, not simply recipients of a service designed elsewhere. (*Detail: Chapter 3*)

⁷ Mental Health Coordinating Council, Submission to Greater Sydney Parklands, *Draft Callan Park Plan of Management 2025 to 2035* (1 October 2025) <https://mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/MHCC-Submission_Callan-Park_1.10.2025.pdf>.

⁸ McGregor Coxall for Leichhardt Council, *Callan Park Master Plan Report* (Report, November 2011) 234–5 <<https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/803/Callan-Park-Master-Plan.pdf.aspx>>; Inner West Council, 'Callan Park Master Plan Awaits Green Light' (Media Release, 4 April 2017) <<https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/about/news/media-releases/2017-media-releases/callan-park-master-plan-awaits-green-light>>.

⁹ Inner West Council, 'Callan Park Master Plan Map', Building 402 <<https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/804/cmp-map.pdf.aspx>>.

¹⁰ NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, *Callan Park: Landscape Structure Plan* (January 2021) <<https://www.greatersydneyparklands.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/callan-park-landscape-structure-plan-part-1.pdf>>.

¹¹ Hall Greenland, 'Friends of Callan Park 25th Anniversary', *Royal Australian Historical Society* (Web Page) <<https://www.rahs.org.au/focp-25th-anniversary/>>.

¹² Mental Health Commission of NSW, *Living Well: A Strategic Plan for Mental Health in NSW 2014–2024* (2014) 14 <[https://nswmentalhealthcommission.com.au/sites/default/files/141002%20Living%20Well%20-%20A%20Strategic%20Plan%20\(1\).pdf](https://nswmentalhealthcommission.com.au/sites/default/files/141002%20Living%20Well%20-%20A%20Strategic%20Plan%20(1).pdf)>.

¹³ Senate Select Committee on Mental Health, Parliament of Australia, *A National Approach to Mental Health – From Crisis to Community* (First Report, March 2006) ch 8 'Inpatient and Crisis Services' <https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Former_Committees/mentalhealth/report/c08>.

1.6 What the Centre Would Offer

At the centre of the proposal is iExpress, one of the first services of its kind in the world. iExpress would give people in prisons, detention and locked psychiatric wards, who often have no access to email or the internet, a way to communicate, express themselves and stay connected with the wider community. Consumers employed at Rose Cottage would digitise letters and send them from each detainee's own email address, then print replies and deliver them back. Participants can also maintain a personal webpage and correspond with community penpals. All content is reviewed before publication.

Around iExpress, Rose Cottage's eight rooms would host a suite of consumer-directed programs:

- computer recycling and technician training, supplying the equipment iExpress runs on
- creative arts, music and community radio run by consumers for consumers
- education, telehealth and peer support
- a peer workforce academy offering accredited training and mentoring
- a clubhouse-style social space
- family and carer support
- practical support for people leaving custody or hospital
- research partnerships and student placements with universities
- a history and learning space for consumers

Each person would be supported through an individual plan developed with them, based on the needs they identify, including a continuing wellness plan for people returning to the community from prison or hospital. (*Detail: Sections 4.1 to 4.3*)

1.7 Delivery, Funding and Next Steps

The Centre would be managed initially by Breakout Media Communications, a social enterprise with almost 40 years' experience and one of the oldest in Australia.¹⁴ It would work alongside Justice Action, an independent community organisation that ran Glebe House, a halfway house for people leaving prison, through the 1970s and 1980s,¹⁵ and has contributed to national mental health reform through submissions to the Productivity Commission. This mirrors the precedent of the Arc Group NSW, a consumer-run organisation for people with lived experience of mental illness.¹⁶

Funding is available immediately through Breakout. Over time, the Centre's own social enterprises would add revenue, including:

- refurbished computer sales
- the *JUST US* newspaper
- online mentoring and teaching
- mentoring funded through the NSW Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI)

Union support has also been offered to help upgrade the building.

We ask Greater Sydney Parklands, and Members of Parliament who share a commitment to Callan Park's mental health legacy, to support securing Rose Cottage as a community-led mental health centre while the opportunity remains. (*Detail: Sections 4.4, 4.5 and Chapter 5*)

¹⁴ Cheryl Kernot, *Australian Stories of Social Enterprise* (Centre for Social Impact, 2011) <<https://www.csi.edu.au/research/project/australian-stories-social-enterprise/>>.

¹⁵ Glebe House, 'What We Do' (Web Page) <<https://www.glebehouse.com.au/about/what-we-do/>>.

¹⁶ Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, 'Arc Group NSW Incorporated' (Charity Register) <<https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/0bfaff88c944bbbbae82076488161aed#history>>.

2. Why Rose Cottage

2.1 Legal and Policy Framework

Callan Park's mental health purpose has a firm basis in law and policy, and that basis is about to be strengthened.

The *Callan Park (Special Provisions) Act 2002* was passed after a long community campaign to protect the Park from sale and private development.¹⁷ It keeps the Park in public ownership; restricts its development to "the purpose of health facilities and educational or community facilities";¹⁸ and includes the explicit object of preserving the Park's heritage significance.¹⁹

Planning for the Park has consistently pointed to buildings like Rose Cottage. The Callan Park Master Plan, developed by Leichhardt Council through extensive community consultation, was approved by Council on 19 July 2011 and presented to the NSW Government on 11 November 2011.²⁰ Its central concept was a "Wellness Sanctuary" for mental health consumers, and it named Rose Cottage specifically as an incubator for non-government organisations (NGOs) providing mental health services such as support groups, day centres and social enterprises.²¹ Although the State Government never formally adopted the Master Plan,²² its own *Callan Park: Landscape Structure Plan* (2021) also identifies Buildings 401–404 for adaptive reuse.²³

That vision has not been delivered. Rose Cottage has stood vacant since 2012, when the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC), the peak body for community-managed mental health organisations in NSW, relocated to Building 125 elsewhere in Callan Park.²⁴

The Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Amendment (Review) Bill 2026, which passed both Houses on 18 September 2026 and is awaiting assent, amends the Callan Park Act in two ways that matter for this proposal.²⁵ First, the Act's objects will for the first time explicitly include providing health facilities and services on land within Callan Park, reflecting NSW Health's part-ownership of the site. Second, the amendments relax the requirement that Callan Park buildings go only to not-for-profit tenants, opening vacant buildings to a broader range of prospective tenants, including commercial ones.

Some procedural features remain relevant. Under the amended framework, public notification and ministerial consent apply only to leases longer than five years, and a tender process is not required for public authorities, charities or short-term agreements.²⁶ The Government has also

¹⁷ Callan Park Trust Bill 2008 Second Reading (n 2).

¹⁸ *Callan Park (Special Provisions) Act 2002* (NSW) s 7(3)
<<https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2002-139>>.

¹⁹ *Ibid* s 4(d).

²⁰ *Callan Park Master Plan Report* (n 8).

²¹ 'Callan Park Master Plan Map' (n 9); *Callan Park Master Plan Report* (n 8) 31.

²² Inner West Council, 'Callan Park Future' (Web Page)
<<https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/develop/state-government-and-utility-works-and-projects/state-government-projects/callan-park-future>>.

²³ *Callan Park: Landscape Structure Plan* (n 10).

²⁴ Mental Health Coordinating Council, Submission (2025) (n 7).

²⁵ 'A Brighter Future for NSW Parklands' (n 5); Explanatory Note, Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Amendment (Review) Bill 2026 (NSW) (n 6).

²⁶ Explanatory Note, Greater Sydney Parklands Trust Amendment (Review) Bill 2026 (NSW) (n 6).

presented the reforms as protecting parkland from sale.²⁷ Taken together, this creates a genuine opportunity for a not-for-profit, mental-health-led proposal for Rose Cottage, but one that will narrow once the amended Act commences and vacant buildings begin attracting other kinds of tenants.



Plaque at Callan Park commemorating the community campaign for the Callan Park (Special Provisions) Act 2002

2.2 History of Callan Park and its Mental Health Legacy

Callan Park was purchased by the NSW Government in 1873 to establish a mental asylum, and over the following 135 years it housed generations of people with psychiatric disabilities.²⁸ At its inception, the asylum reflected reforming ideas. Its first superintendent, Dr Frederic Norton Manning, modernised how patients were classified and treated, helping to shift public attitudes away from seeing people with mental illness as morally at fault and towards the view that they were unwell and entitled to genuine care.²⁹

The Park was also built, gardened and maintained substantially by the labour of the people held there, who received little or no pay for their work.³⁰ Much of the heritage enjoyed today was shaped directly by the hands of mental health consumers.

Callan Park's history also includes an important shift towards voluntary care. Broughton Hall, a neighbouring estate on the western side of the Park, was made available from 1915 to treat soldiers returning from the First World War with "shell shock", now understood as post-traumatic stress.³¹ At a time when all asylum patients were held involuntarily, these soldiers were treated as voluntary patients, and the clinic's focus on rest, meaningful activity, and rehabilitation helped establish voluntary psychiatric care in NSW.³² Broughton Hall and Callan Park were later amalgamated as Rozelle Hospital in 1976.³³

Over time, however, chronic underfunding and overcrowding eroded the asylum's early promise. The 1961 Royal Commission into Callan Park Mental Hospital exposed overcrowding, poor food,

²⁷ 'NSW "Greener Future" Laws to Activate Public Spaces, Stop Parkland Sale', *The Mandarin* (online, 11 February 2026) <<https://www.themandarin.com.au/307285-nsw-greener-future-laws-to-activate-public-spaces-stop-parkland-sale/>>.

²⁸ Callan Park Trust Bill 2008 Second Reading (n 2); Alan Rosen and Leonie Manns, 'Who Owns Callan Park? A Cautionary Tale' (2003) 11(4) *Australasian Psychiatry* 446 <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1046/j.1440-1665.2003.02034.x>>.

²⁹ *Callan Park Master Plan Report* (n 8).

³⁰ *Royal Commission into Callan Park Mental Hospital* (n 3) 381–2.

³¹ Tanner Architects, *Callan Park Conservation Management Plan* (September 2011) 123 <<https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/804/cp-cmp-part4.pdf.aspx>>.

³² *Callan Park Master Plan Report* (n 8) 123, 143.

³³ Leichhardt Council, *Callan Park Plan of Management: Draft for Public Exhibition* (February 2011) s 2 'Description of Callan Park', table 2.1 <<https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/804/cp-pom-section2a.pdf.aspx>>.

hopelessness, poorly supervised staff, concerns about physical abuse, and the token wages paid to patients for a full day's work.³⁴ For largely involuntary patients, care had become coercive, with daily use of chemical and physical restraint and exposure to neurosurgical and experimental treatments.³⁵

The Royal Commission became a catalyst for reform. It helped drive a sustained move away from custodial care in NSW, part of a wider international shift towards deinstitutionalisation and community-based care, most notably in Italy through the reforms led by psychiatrist Franco Basaglia.³⁶ Australia was several decades late in making this transition. Community responses to institutional neglect also gave rise to early rehabilitation organisations such as the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association (PRA), whose work helped lay the groundwork for the community mental health services later delivered at Callan Park, including by Aftercare (now Stride).³⁷

The next phase of deinstitutionalisation moved acute psychiatric care into general hospitals and shifted ongoing support into the community. It was accompanied by a change in thinking, captured in the idea of "ability within disability", which underpins the strengths-based approach still used today. However, persistent underfunding meant these community reforms were never fully realised. Many people were left unsupported at home, and others were pushed into homelessness or the prison system.³⁸ Mental health units and prisons have too often become the places where government neglect ends up.

This history is the basis of an ongoing obligation, not just a historical footnote. Government created the conditions for harm on this land, and many of the problems the Royal Commission identified persist in health and custodial institutions today. Using this land to deliver genuinely consumer-led, dignified mental health support is a direct way to answer that history, rather than simply commemorate it. It is also consistent with the National Mental Health Strategy's *Statement of Rights and Responsibilities*, which holds that people with psychiatric disabilities should be the primary beneficiaries of resources released by the closure of institutions.³⁹ To overlook mental health consumers in the Park's future would be to take from the vulnerable and disregard the site's heritage. This is not an argument against recreational use of the Park, but for a genuine balance of uses.

2.3 Community Mandate and Backing

Community support for keeping mental health central to Callan Park's future has been consistent and strong. The extensive consultation behind the 2011 Master Plan found "virtually unanimous support" for mental health uses on the site, and the Master Plan recommended that at least 30% of jobs on the site be reserved for mental health consumers.⁴⁰ The plan's stated vision was to redevelop the Park as "a sanctuary for mental health consumers".⁴¹ Inner West Council has

³⁴ *Royal Commission into Callan Park Mental Hospital* (n 3) 381–2.

³⁵ *Callan Park Master Plan Report* (n 8); Roslyn Burge, 'Callan Park: Compassion and Conflict in the Asylum', *Friends of Callan Park* (Web Page) <<https://www.callanpark.com/callan-park-compassion-and-conflict-in-the-asylum-roslyn-burge/>>.

³⁶ 'Franco Basaglia in the Historic Struggle for Deinstitutionalisation', *PubMed Central* <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6998870/>>.

³⁷ John Kingsmill, *Dancing with Patients: How PRA Began* (Edgecliff, 2004).

³⁸ Senate Select Committee on Mental Health, Parliament of Australia, *Hearing* (27 July 2005) <www.parlinfo.apf.gov.au/parlinfo/search/display.w3p?query=id%3A%22committees%2F8569%2F003>.

³⁹ Department of Health (Cth), *Mental Health Statement of Rights and Responsibilities* (National Mental Health Strategy, 2012) 449.

⁴⁰ *Callan Park Master Plan Report* (n 8) 234–5; 'Callan Park Master Plan Awaits Green Light' (n 8).

⁴¹ *Callan Park Master Plan Report* (n 8) 2.

continued to press for this vision, including through a public meeting on the future of the Park convened by Mayor Darcy Byrne in February 2018.⁴²

This proposal also aligns with the long-standing advocacy of the Friends of Callan Park (FOCP), which has spent more than 25 years campaigning to locate modern mental health services on the site, alongside protecting the Park's heritage and keeping community-benefit, not-for-profit use at the centre of its future.⁴³ Government and the community share a moral and legal obligation to reactivate Callan Park for the primary benefit of mental health consumers, consistent with the mandate the community has given this cause repeatedly since 2011.

That obligation extends to the Traditional Custodians of the land. As the Master Plan acknowledges, the dispossession of the Wangal people and the provision of targeted mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are yet to be reconciled.⁴⁴ Any centre at Rose Cottage should be shaped in partnership with Aboriginal communities.

2.4 Guiding Principles

The Centre is designed to fulfil the following principles, drawn from the Callan Park Master Plan:⁴⁵

- Future development of health, not-for-profit community and not-for-profit educational facilities.
- Complementary health, community and educational uses are encouraged to maximise synergies and benefits for the community.
- Community health and education uses at Callan Park demonstrate a commitment to social, environmental and economic sustainability.
- Public access to open space offering an equitable balance of active and passive recreation, contributing to community health and wellbeing.

⁴² Inner West Council, 'Meeting to Outline the Future of Callan Park' (Web Page, 2018)

<<https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/develop/state-government-and-utility-works-and-projects/state-government-projects/callan-park-future/meeting-to-outline-the-future-of-callan-park>>.

⁴³ Greenland (n 11).

⁴⁴ *Callan Park Master Plan Report* (n 8) 256.

⁴⁵ Ibid 86.

3. Mental Health Policy Reform

The Callan Park Master Plan endorses the need for specific functions, such as peer support and information, within its proposed Mental Health and Wellness Centre.⁴⁶

A consumer-led approach is holistic, joined-up and non-authoritarian, and is informed by people whose expertise comes from lived experience. For example, rather than offering clinician-prescribed art therapy, the Centre would support consumers to use art in whatever way helps them, whether as self-expression, as a way to self-calm, or as a pathway to work, within their own individual plan. Used this way, art can be healing, self-defining, pre-vocational and economic.

Justice Action has been an active participant in mental health reform. During the Productivity Commission's inquiry into mental health, it was invited to make further submissions. The first analysed the problems the current system creates for consumers. The second, prepared at the Commission's request, addressed the widespread support across the mental health sector for community-led and consumer-led services and a peer-led workforce.⁴⁷

3.1 Recovery Model

Psychiatric distress and disability are rising, yet the development of community-based programs continues to lag behind.⁴⁸ The Mental Health Council of Australia has highlighted that consumers are often discharged "without any rehabilitation plan", leaving families and the wider community to carry the burden of care.⁴⁹

National policy recognises self-determination as central to recovery.⁵⁰ Yet although Australia and NSW have policies that embrace consumer-led care, a significant gap remains between policy and practice, and many people remain trapped in cycles of crisis care. The Callan Park Consumer Centre would help close this gap through a consumer-led, recovery-oriented approach.

In NSW, the direction for reform was set out in *Living Well: A Strategic Plan for Mental Health in NSW 2014–2024*, the ten-year plan developed by the Mental Health Commission of NSW.⁵¹ At its heart is a requirement for consumer participation at all levels, with growth of the peer workforce one of its five key indicators.⁵² Drawing on the World Health Organization, it notes that community care offers people with mental illness a better quality of life, and that moving care out

⁴⁶ Ibid 121.

⁴⁷ Justice Action, 'Productivity Commission – Mental Health Review 2020' (Web Page) <<https://www.justiceaction.org.au/campaigns-initiatives/226-current-campaigns/consumer-controlled-funding/1034-productivity-commission-mental-health-review>>.

⁴⁸ Senate Select Committee on Mental Health, *First Report* ch 8 (n 13); Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Mental Health Services in Brief 2019* (Report, 2019) 10 <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mental-health-services/mental-health-services-in-australia/report-contents/summary/prevalence-and-policies>>.

⁴⁹ Senate Select Committee on Mental Health, *First Report* ch 8 (n 13); Senate Select Committee on Mental Health, Parliament of Australia, *A National Approach to Mental Health – From Crisis to Community* (First Report, March 2006) ch 9 'Mental Health Services in the Community' <https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Former_Committees/mentalhealth/report/c09>.

⁵⁰ Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, *A National Framework for Recovery-Oriented Mental Health Services: Guide for Practitioners and Providers* (Report, July 2012).

⁵¹ *Living Well* (n 12).

⁵² Ibid 14.

of mental hospitals is "cost effective and respects human rights".⁵³ Peer workers, as role models with lived experience, are central to this recovery-oriented approach.⁵⁴

The continuing obligation at Callan Park is therefore to provide contemporary mental health support that is consistent with state and federal policy: peer-led, recovery-oriented services that counter the most damaging secondary effects of mental illness—such as isolation, stigma, and exclusion, and instead promote community acceptance, social inclusion, and meaningful pre-vocational engagement.

3.2 Consumer Involvement

Australia's custodial approach to both mental health and justice has left a legacy of harm that has yet to be put right: evidence of institutional abuse, neglect and exclusion, and too little hope or rehabilitation for the people affected. As one national report put it:

*"Ask anyone with a serious mental illness and they will tell you of people they know who have committed suicide after being neglected, rejected or turned away from services."*⁵⁵

- Ms Hellen Connor

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) has emphasised that mental health law should protect the liberty of people with a mental illness, and that care should use the least restrictive practices in the least restrictive environment.⁵⁶ In 2005, the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health heard submissions that forced medication is at odds with recovery, and that a wholly biological approach downgrades the psychological and social interventions that support both personal and social recovery.⁵⁷

People with lived experience of mental illness continue to experience poorer quality of life and isolation, which is both a sign and an avoidable result of discrimination and stigma.⁵⁸ Peer support is one of the most effective responses. In its 2011 policy platform, *Changing the Focus: A Recovery Based Mental Health System*, the NSW Consumer Advisory Group (now BEING – Mental Health Consumers) identified a lack of peer support options and the need for a sustainable peer workforce, quoting one consumer: "I get more support from people with similar situations because they know what is going on inside me."⁵⁹

Living Well, the NSW mental health strategy outlined in Section 3.1, frames recovery around hope and choice, a sense of purpose, and valuable relationships, which together are an antidote

⁵³ World Health Organization, 'Chapter 5: The Way Forward' in *The World Health Report 2001 – Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope* (2001) <<https://www.who.int/whr/2001/chapter5/en/index1.html>>.

⁵⁴ *Living Well* (n 12).

⁵⁵ Grace Groom, Ian Hickie and Tracy Davenport, *Out of Hospital, Out of Mind!* (Report, Mental Health Council of Australia, April 2003) 14 <https://mhaustralia.org/sites/default/files/imported/component/rsfiles/mental-health-services/Out_of_Hospital_Out_of_Mind.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Public Interest Advocacy Centre, *Delays in Inquiries under the Mental Health Act: A Cause for Concern* (Issues Paper) 2 <<https://www.piac.asn.au>>.

⁵⁷ Senate Select Committee on Mental Health, Parliament of Australia, *A National Approach to Mental Health – From Crisis to Community* (First Report, March 2006) 122 <https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Former_Committees/mentalhealth/report/index>.

⁵⁸ *Royal Commission into Callan Park Mental Hospital* (n 3) 37.

⁵⁹ NSW Consumer Advisory Group – Mental Health, *Changing the Focus: A Recovery Based Mental Health System* (Policy Platform, NSW Election 2011) 12 <<http://old.being.org.au/files/our%20work/submissions/nsw%20cags%20policy%20platform%20nsw%20election%202011.pdf>>.

to isolation and loneliness. It calls not only for people to survive, but to receive care that respects their autonomy and dignity.⁶⁰

The National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum (NMHCCF) has long argued that the "vital voice" of consumers, on the quality of their care and what they want from services, has been missing from mental health reform.⁶¹ They have argued that participation alone is not enough, describing consumers and carers as "the very resource that can turn public services around".⁶²

This is captured in the consumer movement's principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us": the right of consumers to self-determination in their own care, and the need to place lived experience at the centre of services. Rose Cottage is proposed on exactly this basis, as a centre where mental health consumers are central to the services provided, not simply their recipients.

⁶⁰ *Living Well* (n 12) 7.

⁶¹ National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum, 'Consumers and Carers Must Be Included in Mental Health Reforms' (Media Release, 2010) 2–3
<<https://nmhccf.org.au/publication/media-release-consumers-and-carers-must-be-included-mental-health-reforms>>.

⁶² National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum, 'Soar Beyond Rhetorical: Nothing About Us Without Us' (2019)
<<https://nmhccf.org.au/publication/soar-beyond-rhetorical-nothing-about-us-without-us>>.

4. Our Proposal

Rose Cottage is proposed as a genuinely consumer-led centre, with consumers as staff, mentors and decision-makers rather than simply recipients of a service designed elsewhere. The Centre would be consumer-led, with management and financial responsibility held initially by an experienced operator (see Section 4.4).

4.1 iExpress and Supporting Programs

iExpress is the centrepiece of this proposal. It is a communication service for people who are cut off from the wider world, including consumers locked in psychiatric hospitals and people in prisons, who otherwise have little or no access to email, the internet or a public voice. iExpress builds a bridge between these people and the wider community. It is the first initiative of its kind in the world, and has been featured by the *Huffington Post*.

The service would work in both directions. Letters and messages from people in prisons and locked hospitals will be collected and digitised, then sent out from each person's own email address. Replies are then printed and delivered back in written form. This gives each person a working digital identity and a reliable way to stay in touch with family, friends, advocates and support services.

Each participant can also have a personal webpage, providing a stable public profile on which they can share a statement about themselves, their experiences and their views. This reflects the rights to freedom of expression and opinion protected by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.⁶³ A penpal service will connect participants with members of the community who wish to correspond with them, reducing isolation and supporting reconnection with the community. iExpress has the support of victims' groups and provides a platform for restorative justice. All content is reviewed by the Justice Action team, and nothing defamatory, aggressive or showing ill will is published. Further information about the service is available on the iExpress website.

Around iExpress, Rose Cottage would host a set of complementary, consumer-directed programs, including:

- **Computer recycling and technician training:** refurbishing donated computers for welfare and training purposes, giving consumers vocational skills and supplying the equipment iExpress runs on. Justice Action previously received donated hardware through the charity Techhelp, which has since closed; Technical Aid to the Disabled (TAD), which provides personalised technology and equipment to people with disability, is a potential replacement partner.⁶⁴ Courses in hardware maintenance and software development could be run with volunteer technicians or TAFE teachers, with trainees maintaining the equipment.
- **Creative arts and music:** self-directed creative expression run by consumers for consumers, rather than clinically prescribed art therapy. This would include studio and exhibition space in the Cottage and an online platform where consumers can exhibit and sell their own work.

⁶³ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, GA Res 217A (III), UN GAOR, UN Doc A/810 (10 December 1948) arts 2, 3, 12, 18, 19, 22, 27.

⁶⁴ Technical Aid to the Disabled, 'About' (Web Page) <<https://tad.org.au/about/>>.

- **Community radio and podcasting:** a small studio producing radio programs and podcasts that give airtime to the stories and voices of consumers and people in prison, and connect the Centre with wider communities.
- **Education, telehealth and peer support:** ongoing learning, remote clinical access for people who face barriers to in-person care, and peer-led mentoring, consistent with *Living Well*'s priority on growing the peer workforce.
- **A peer workforce academy:** formalising accredited training, leadership development and supervision for peer workers, positioning the Centre as a training pathway into the growing peer workforce rather than a single-site service. In conjunction with the MHCC, a Registered Training Organisation, consumers could be trained and certified to provide mentoring under the NSW Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI), which also offers a potential funding stream.⁶⁵
- **A clubhouse-style social space:** based on the Clubhouse model used by One Door Mental Health, a place where consumers and community members come together to socialise and build a sense of belonging, and where work teams (such as office support or a lunch club) help run the Centre and build pre-vocational skills.⁶⁶
- **Family and carer support:** carer education, respite activities and family peer support, recognising that carers have their own distinct needs alongside consumers.
- **Support on release and discharge:** working with NSW custodial and forensic facilities to provide practical "survival packages" and support for people about to leave, or recently released from, detention or hospital, reducing the risk of reoffending and readmission.
- **Research and student placements:** placements for final-year university students in law, criminology, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience and social work, extending to co-designed research and evaluation projects with universities and health services.
- **A history and learning space:** not a static museum, but an interpretive space acknowledging the Park's institutional history, the reforms that followed, and the consumer movement's role in driving change.

4.2 Consumer Participation and Individual Planning

Consumers and carers have repeatedly raised concerns that medication does not work for everyone and that forced medication is at odds with recovery (see Section 3.2), and have highlighted the vital role consumers play as carers for one another.

The Centre would support each person through an individual plan, consistent with the Master Plan's emphasis on each person "drawing up and implementing an 'Individual Plan'".⁶⁷ Plans would be designed not only to reduce reoffending but to prevent further mental distress and build on each person's strengths and potential. Consumers could be referred from any source outside Callan Park. After intake, a personal planning team would assess each person's needs, listen to their requests and concerns, and develop the plan directly with them, based on the needs they identify.

⁶⁵ Mental Health Coordinating Council, Submission (2025) (n 7); Justice Action, 'JA Mentoring' (Web Page) <<https://www.justiceaction.org.au/mentoring-2>>.

⁶⁶ One Door Mental Health, 'What Is a Clubhouse' (Web Page) <<https://www.onedoor.org.au/services/pioneer-clubhouse-balgowlah/about-us>>.

⁶⁷ *Callan Park Master Plan Report* (n 8) 121.

For people coming to the Centre from prison, detention or hospital, a continuing wellness plan would also be developed with the consumer, their clinicians and support people as they return to the community, to support their ongoing recovery once they are home.

4.3 Rose Cottage

Rose Cottage (Building 402) is an ideal site for the Centre. It was previously used by the MHCC, but has stood vacant since the Council relocated to Building 125 in 2012.⁶⁸ The Cottage has eight rooms across two floors, five of which are well suited to iExpress, computer recycling, training and meetings, providing enough space to run the programs in Section 4.1 alongside iExpress.

The Centre would build on the principles of the Master Plan and of *Our Backyard*, Justice Action's 2018 proposal for a consumer housing cooperative at Callan Park.⁶⁹ There is also strong community support for services such as Aftercare (now Stride) and We Help Ourselves (WHOS) to have a continued and expanded presence at Callan Park, and these could work alongside the Centre in supporting consumers' recovery.



Left: Rose Cottage. Right: location of Rose Cottage within Callan Park

4.3.1 Rose Cottage and the 2011 Callan Park Master Plan

The Master Plan, which was adopted by Leichhardt Council after resounding community support, identified Rose Cottage for use by the NGO sector.⁷⁰ It proposed that the Cottage operate as an "NGO Incubator" and a base for NGO mental health services such as support groups, day centres, art and mental health activities, and social enterprises,⁷¹ which are the services this proposal would deliver. The Leichhardt Council's draft Plan of Management likewise refers to the adaptive reuse of Rose Cottage by an NGO mental health service provider.⁷²

The MHCC's 2011 submission on the draft Master Plan similarly called for a hub for community-managed organisations (CMOs) at Callan Park, including a consumer mental health resource centre offering work, training and recreation opportunities. Its purposes included

⁶⁸ Mental Health Coordinating Council, Submission (2025) (n 7).

⁶⁹ Justice Action, 'Our Backyard – Proposal for a Callan Park Consumer Housing Cooperative' (Web Page, January 2018) <<https://www.justiceaction.org.au/campaigns2/callan-park-accommodation>>.

⁷⁰ 'Callan Park Master Plan Map' (n 9).

⁷¹ *Callan Park Master Plan Report* (n 8) 31.

⁷² Leichhardt Council, *Callan Park Plan of Management: Draft for Public Exhibition* (February 2011) 107.

promoting social inclusion, building community awareness to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness, providing information and training to consumers and carers, and operating small-scale social enterprises.⁷³

The Master Plan also identified gaps in service provision, addressed through three core elements of its Mental Health Concept: "Vocational and Social", "Information and Support" and "Health and Lifestyle". Each focuses on a person's early engagement in their own continuing recovery.⁷⁴ The Centre would also need an adequate security system to protect consumers and staff, with appropriate security arrangements covering both the Cottage and the surrounding parkland.

4.4 Delivery and Management

The Centre would be managed initially by Breakout Media Communications (Breakout), working cooperatively with other NGOs. Breakout is a social enterprise with almost 40 years' experience, both in running its own enterprise and in accommodation and welfare services, and has the public liability insurance and financial standing needed to take on this role. Former politician Cheryl Kernot described Breakout as one of the oldest social enterprises in Australia in her 2011 book *Australian Stories of Social Enterprise*.⁷⁵

Justice Action, an independent community organisation funded by Breakout, works with some of the most isolated people in the community and campaigns against abuse of authority. It brings directly relevant experience. It created and managed Glebe House, a halfway house for people leaving prison, through the 1970s and 1980s;⁷⁶ for 23 years it was a leading agency supervising hundreds of people placed on community service orders by the courts; and it has made submissions to the Productivity Commission on mental health reform (see Section 3). Its approach follows the precedent of the Arc Group NSW, a consumer-run organisation for people with lived experience of mental illness.⁷⁷

This combination gives the proposal a funded, credible, and experienced path to delivery, consistent with the not-for-profit, charitable model that the amended Act continues to support through simplified pathways for charitable and shorter-term arrangements.

4.5 Financial Support

Funding is available immediately, as the project is supported by Breakout, with scope to grow through additional sources over time. The Centre's own social enterprises would generate further revenue, including sales of refurbished computers and equipment; advertising and sales of *JUST US*, a newspaper produced with the help of consumers;⁷⁸ paid online mentoring and teaching services; and mentoring funded through HASI packages (see Section 4.1). This activity would also allow Breakout to expand its social enterprise work. Union support has been offered to help upgrade the building to a workable standard.

⁷³ Mental Health Coordinating Council, Submission to Leichhardt Council, *Draft Master Plan for Callan Park* (18 May 2011) 4 <<http://www.mhcc.org.au/media/8769/leichhardt-council-callan-park-master-plan-submissio-18-05-2011.pdf>>.

⁷⁴ *Callan Park Master Plan Report* (n 8) 121.

⁷⁵ Kernot (n 14).

⁷⁶ Glebe House (n 15).

⁷⁷ Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (n 16).

⁷⁸ *JUST US* (Website) <<https://justus.net.au/>>.

5. Conclusion and Ask

Rose Cottage offers a low-cost, high-impact way to keep a genuine, active mental health presence within Callan Park, fulfilling both the Park's soon-to-be strengthened legal purpose and its historical debt to the people who lived, worked and too often suffered there. iExpress gives this proposal a concrete, immediately deliverable service, backed by an experienced and credible operator in Breakout Media Communications and Justice Action.

With the amended Act awaiting assent and Rose Cottage still vacant, there is a narrow but real window to secure the building for its intended purpose before it is offered elsewhere. Consistent with the *Callan Park: Landscape Structure Plan*'s recommendation that Building 402 be adaptively reused,⁷⁹ we propose that Rose Cottage be adapted as a community-controlled mental health centre. We ask Greater Sydney Parklands, and Members of Parliament who share a commitment to Callan Park's mental health legacy, to support this proposal.



Rose Cottage (Building 402), Callan Park

⁷⁹ *Callan Park: Landscape Structure Plan* (n 10).