

NEW S.A. MENTAL HEALTH ACT COULD SEE CHILDREN TREATED & GIVEN DANGEROUS PSYCHIATRIC DRUGS WITHOUT ANY PARENTAL CONSENT

THE MENTAL HEALTH ACT IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA HAS BEEN REVIEWED. THE NEW BILL HAS BEEN PASSED BY BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT. NONE OF THE AMENDMENTS MADE INCLUDED THE BANNING OF INVOLUNTARY TREATMENT OF CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENTAL CONSENT. THE USE OF ELECTROSHOCK, RESTRAINT AND SECLUSION IN CHILDREN REMAIN LEGAL. PLEASE TAKE ACTION TO EDUCATE OTHERS AND HELP FORCE IN AMENDMENTS FOR THE FUTURE.

- **INVOLUNTARY TREATMENT OF CHILDREN:** The new bill allows for a child to be involuntarily detained in a hospital – meaning they are detained by law and parents cannot take them home if the psychiatrist says no. A psychiatrist could give the child any treatment they considers necessary and this could include: electro-shock; forced administration of drugs; seclusion, use of dangerous drugs known to cause death, suicidal behaviour, heart problems & hallucinations in children. Parents could have **no say** whatsoever in the treatment, including the child being placed on a legal order to continue to receive drugs at home.
- **CHILDREN COULD BE PLACED IN ADULT WARDS:** The new bill states: “Children and young persons should be cared for and treated separately from other patients “as necessary” to enable the care and treatment to be tailored to their different developmental stages.” This does not prevent a child from being placed with adult patients. In 2004/05 there were a staggering 1,000 children in Australia housed in wards with adults, able to be approached and touched. This situation must not be allowed to happen to our vulnerable children.
- **ELECTROSHOCK (ECT) COULD BE GIVEN TO CHILDREN:** ECT consists of up to 460 volts of electricity applied to the brain to cause the equivalent of a grand mal seizure or fit. There are no restrictions for the use of ECT on any age group in SA including children, pregnant women and the elderly. ECT can cause not only brain damage and loss of memory but also death. It needs to be fully outlawed in S.A.
- **CHILDREN CAN BE RESTRAINED AND SECLUDED:** The last thing a parent would want would be for their vulnerable and upset child to be tied down with restraints. This is not therapy—it is abusive treatment. Deaths from restraint have caused headlines in the US where the practice is common. The new bill does not make this illegal for children or the elderly. Use of restraint indicates poor skills in dealing with vulnerable people and can lead to trauma and greater mental stress. Seclusion is similar—that may happen in prison with criminals, not in hospitals with the mentally ill. It is deprivation and a human rights abuse. No child should ever be exposed to something that could cause death. Restraint and seclusion must be banned.
- **REASONABLE FORCE TO ADMINISTER TREATMENT:** Who decides what is considered reasonable? The new bill allows for the legal use of “reasonable force” on anyone regardless of age in order administer treatment. It is not uncommon for a child to protest treatment. Any protest or objection is considered refusal. This can be very traumatic. This also takes away the rights of a parent to refuse harmful treatment for your child.
- **ALTERNATIVES:** Some children who are troubled require special care—no doubt. But they should get holistic, humane care that improves their condition. Institutions should be safe havens where parents & adults voluntarily seek help for themselves or their child without fear of indefinite incarceration or harmful treatment. They need a quiet safe environment, good nutrition, rest, exercise and help with life’s problems. Extensive medical evidence proves that *underlying and undiagnosed physical illnesses* can manifest as “psychiatric” symptoms, and therefore should be addressed with the correct *medical* treatment, not psychiatric. Studies show that once the physical condition is handled, the mental symptoms disappear. With proper medical treatment people can lead healthier, happier lives.

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTION YOU CAN DO IS WRITE TO ALL THE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT. VISIT: www.parliament.sa.gov.au FOR THEIR CONTACT DETAILS. SEND A COPY OF YOUR LETTER TO THE MENTAL HEALTH MINISTER, The Hon Jane Lomax- Smith GPO Box 778, Adelaide, SA 5001 OR EMAIL AT minedcs@saugov.sa.gov.au. TO VIEW THE BILL VISIT www.legislation.sa.gov.au/index.aspx.

CLICK ON “BILLS” AND THEN CLICK ON “M” UNDER “BILLS OF THE 3RD SESSION.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT CCHR on (02) 99649844 or national@cchr.org.au